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TRAGIC EFFECT IN *SAMSON AGONISTES*

A.S.P. Woodhouse

The point of view from which I propose to look afresh at *Samson Agonistes*[1] seems perfectly simple and even obvious, and yet, so far as I know, it has never been tried.

Misled by Milton's prefatory emphasis on his Greek models, an emphasis entirely justified if properly understood, critics have assumed that the poet intended not only to follow them in structure and convention but to reproduce their spirit and effect, and that hence the only possible criterion for judging *Samson Agonistes* is Greek tragedy. Opinions on his success have differed. Jebb (to take a famous example) vigorously defends Milton against Johnson's charge that *Samson Agonistes* has a beginning and end but no middle, that nothing occurs to precipitate the catastrophe. But he goes on to condemn the drama as not truly tragic, as not Hellenic at all in spirit and effect, but thoroughly Hebraic. It does not, like Greek tragedy, pit the hero against superior powers before which he goes down to inevitable defeat, yet demonstrates his heroism even in his defeat. On the contrary, Samson is an instrument of the Supreme Power, and the only possible conclusion is that "All is best." Nor, in the most vigorous and effective defence against Jebb, does W. R. Parker question the assumption that Greek tragedy furnishes the sole and sufficient criterion. But it is precisely this assumption that I would question.

In *Paradise Lost* Milton follows his classical models every whit as closely as in *Samson Agonistes*; yet no one supposes that he is trying to reproduce the spirit and effect of Homer, or even of Virgil. His purpose is to adapt the classical epic form to a Christian content and outlook, and to achieve thereby a new but still genuinely epic effect. And I would ask whether *mutatis mutandis* the same thing may not be true of *Samson Agonistes*. The only way to find out is to re-examine the drama from this point of view, that is, with two questions in mind: What

is the effect actually achieved? And is it one that can be legitimately described as tragic?

II

To attempt an answer, however tentative, to these questions we must establish a proper understanding of the theme and action, and on the way thereto may comment on the insufficiency of Jebb's. He recognizes that "Samson's will is the agent of the catastrophe" and that everything which "helps to determine his will and define his purpose" leads on to it. But he proceeds: "The force which is to produce the catastrophe is the inward force of Samson's own despair, not an external necessity pressing upon him." On the contrary (as I have heretofore argued, and D. C. Allen has further demonstrated) it is not Samson's despair that produces the catastrophe, but his gradual rising out of his initial state of feeling, in which indeed the last heroic act would have been quite impossible. Again, it is true that Samson voluntarily precipitates the catastrophe (for Milton never surrenders his robust belief in man's free will within God's providential scheme, and could not possibly achieve the effect at which he aims if he did so here). But if there is "no external necessity," there is still an overruling power: there is God who controls the outcome: and this fact, paradoxically, Jebb later insists upon in order to explain Milton's failure to achieve the Greek tragic effect. In his reading of the poem Jebb altogether misses the interplay of these two forces, Samson's will and God's, because while he oversimplifies the conception of God as Providence, he ignores the intense religious experience undergone by Samson as he comes to a realization that God's "ear is ever open; and his eye / Gracious to re-admit the suppliant" (1172–3). When Jebb insists on the Hebraism of *Samson Agonistes*, he does not ask himself how much of this adheres inevitably to the legend with which Milton is working, or whether the religion which permeates the poem is not in fact Christian, and whether it is not the Christianity, far more than the Hebraism, that differentiates it in effect from Greek tragedy. The problem of *Samson Agonistes* is part of the problem of Christian tragedy—of the problem and Milton's solution of it.

Act I (as we may call it: 1–331: Samson, Chorus) gives us Samson's situation and initial state of mind. He has sinned and been most dreadfully punished. But the punishment, be it noted (for this is characteristic of Milton's whole presentation), is the natural and inevitable outcome of Samson's actions, just as the sufferings of Oedipus are the natural

and inevitable outcome of his. Blinded, now, enslaved, the mockery of his enemies, Samson knows that all these evils have come upon him through his own weakness. He experiences bitterest remorse; but this is not repentance: it is too entirely self-centred for that, and it has issued in a degree of despair (itself a sin in the Christian view) which can entertain no thought of forgiveness, no ray of hope. Yet Samson's foot is on the path that leads to repentance, though it will first lead him yet deeper into the Slough of Despond: he has acknowledged that the fault is wholly his. I can find, he says,

> Ease to the body some, none to the mind
> From restless thoughts, that like a deadly swarm
> Of hornets arm'd, no sooner found alone,
> But rush upon me thronging, and present
> Times past, what once I was, and what am now. . . .
> Why was my breeding order'd and prescrib'd
> As of a person separate to God,
> Design'd for great exploits, if I must die
> Betray'd, captiv'd, and both my eyes put out,
> Made of my enemies the scorn and gaze? . . .
>
> Promise was that I
> Should Israel from Philistian yoke deliver;
> Ask for this great Deliverer now, and find him
> Eyeless in Gaza at the mill with slaves. . . .
> Yet stay, let me not rashly call in doubt
> Divine prediction; what if all foretold
> Had been fulfill'd but through mine own default;
> Whom have I to complain of but myself? (18–46)

Doubts momentarily assail him, and complaints of Providence mingle with his self-reproach, so that the Chorus is fain to counsel, "Tax not Divine disposal" (210), though this is only the submission which Samson himself acknowledges as God's due, and indeed echoes his own words:

> But peace, I must not quarrel with the will
> Of highest dispensation, which herein
> Haply had ends beyond my reach to know.
> (60–2)

Taken in conjunction with Samson's full admission of his personal responsibility, these lines give us our first clue to the inner tension between man's freedom and God's Providence which only the final words of the poem will resolve.

From the conviction of his own responsibility Samson never wavers. Even of Dalila, "That specious monster, my accomplish'd snare," he can aver, "She was not the prime cause, but I myself" (230, 234). Still Samson is far from true repentance. His remorse (as we have said) is in large measure self-centred:

> [I] like a foolish pilot have shipwreckt
> My vessel trusted to me from above,
> Gloriously rigg'd; and for a word, a tear,
> Fool, have divulg'd the secret gift of God
> To a deceitful woman. Tell me, friends,
> Am I not sung and proverb'd for a fool
> In every street; do they not say, how well
> Are come upon him his deserts? (198–205)

These are the words of wounded pride, and pride, as Allen recognizes, has its issue in religious despair. Conformable to the truths of moral theology, this is also the fruit of Milton's imaginative insight. To the Chorus, Samson appears

> As one past hope, abandon'd
> And by himself given over.
> (120–1)

The principal purpose of this mainly expository first Act is, then, to underline Samson's remorse (not yet repentance) and his religious despair: to give us the starting point of the movement back to God—and on to the catastrophe. But, incidentally, the Act brings home to us three other facts; first, the remoteness of Milton's Samson from the sanctified barbarian of the Book of Judges, the tribal folk hero, incapable of religious experience. Secondly, we begin to be aware that in Milton's treatment (unlike Vondel's) the primary focus is religious and personal, not national (even from the depth of his self-reproach Samson can rouse himself to disclaim responsibility for Israel's plight—235 ff.), though the national aspect of the action will be present throughout in a secondary rôle and will have its place in the final resolution. And, thirdly, we already recognize the character and function of the Chorus: it is Hebrew in its outlook and offers as it were a Hebraic commentary on the story which the poet will present, consistently though unobtrusively, from a Christian standpoint, and thus it serves the purposes of historical realism; it is not the mouthpiece of the poet: it does not run ahead of events, but like the audience follows them step by step and learns from them what it can.

Less simple is the rôle of Manoa, whose entrance marks the beginning of Act II (332–709: Samson, Manoa, Chorus). True to his classical models Milton subordinates his people to the action and to the central figure of the hero, but Manoa's functions are varied and more than the others he gives the impression of a self-motivating character. Here, as again in the final Act, he supplements the Chorus, now joining in Samson's lament, now criticizing his "marriage choices," even, like Samson, and like the Chorus, seeming to question the ways of Providence, rebuked this time by Samson himself:

> Appoint not heavenly disposition, Father.
> Nothing of all these evils hath befallen me
> But justly; I myself have brought them on,
> Sole author I, sole cause. . . . (373–5)

In his main endeavour Manoa is deluded: his effort to ransom his son is a counter-action wholly ironic. Yet his words have an effect on Samson beyond, and sometimes contrary to, their intention. They bring home to Samson the offence against God and against Israel:

> Father I do acknowledge and confess
> That I this honour, I this pomp have brought to Dagon . . . ;
> to God have brought
> Dishonour . . . ;
> have brought scandal
> To Israel, diffidence of God and doubt
> To feeble hearts . . . ;
> Which is my chief affliction, shame, and sorrow,
> The anguish of my soul, that suffers not
> Mine eye to harbour sleep or thoughts to rest.
> (448–59)

This is a step forward, though for the time being it only deepens Samson's despair. More subtly still, in the course of his mistaken argument Manoa puts his finger on the insufficiency of Samson's remorse: it turns too much on the offence against himself: God, says Manoa,

> ever more approves and more accepts
> (Best pleas'd with humble and filial submission)
> Him who imploring mercy sues for life
> Than who self-rigorous chooses death as due;
> Which argues over-just and self-displeas'd
> For self-offence, more than for God offended.
> (510–15)

Rejecting his father's proposal and his optimistic inferences, Samson fastens on these words:

> His pardon I implore; but as for life
> To what end should I seek it? (521–2)

To conceive the possibility of pardon is of course to take another step forward; but to conceive it in this context is not immediately to lighten the burden. Indeed, in this Act, Samson reaches his lowest depth of despair;

> Oh, that torments should not be confin'd
> To the body's wounds and sores . . .
> But must secret passage find
> To th' inmost mind. . . .
>
> Sleep hath forsook me and giv'n me o'er
> To death's benumbing opium as my only cure.
> Thence faintings, swoonings of despair
> And sense of Heav'n's desertion. (606–32)

And from the Chorus, orthodox though it be, Samson's misery wrings the impassioned cry of bafflement:

> God of our Fathers, what is man!
> That thou towards him with a hand so various,
> Or might I say contrarious,
> Temper'st thy providence through his short course,
> Not evenly, as thou rul'st
> The Angelic orders and inferior creatures mute,
> Irrational and brute.
> Nor do I name of men the common rout . . .
> But such as thou has solemnly elected,
> With gifts and graces eminently adorn'd,
> To some great work, thy glory
> And people's safety. . . .
>
> Nor only dost degrade them, or remit
> To life obscur'd, which were a fair dismission,
> But throw'st them lower than thou didst exalt them high,
> Unseemly falls in human eye,
> Too grievous for the trespass or omission. . . . (667–91)

The Chorus itself will correct this judgment in its final comment, but not so as to dispel the whole of the mystery. Meanwhile it makes its powerful contribution to the darkness, through which a gleam of light is presently to break. But first must come the two crucial encounters, with Dalila and with Harapha. For the first, if it is to have its due effect, the essential preparation is Samson's repentance; for the second, the con-

viction already voiced by Samson *de profundis,* that if with him the strife is over, God is still God and in his own good time and way will triumph over Dagon (460–71).

In Act III (710–1074: Samson, Dalila, Chorus) the coming of Dalila is described with incomparable vividness by the Chorus; but her motives are left by Milton obscure. They do not matter: she is there for the sake of Samson and the action, not in her own right. The primary function of the scene is to demonstrate by Dalila's powerlessness to reassert her sway the completeness of Samson's repentance. Only obedience, Milton believes, can remit the sin of disobedience—Christ's obedience for Adam's disobedience, Samson's for his own—and what is remitted is the sin, not all its consequences. But this is no mere demonstration or for the audience alone. It has its effect upon Samson himself and hence upon the action. He has won his first victory, over himself; and, though he does not realize it, he approaches his next decisive encounter with new possibilities of emotional response.

Act IV, if the divisions were marked, would fall into two scenes. The first (1075–1307: Samson, Harapha, Chorus) presents this encounter, with the champion of the Philistines. It will precipitate the summons to appear before the lords, the occasion of the final catastrophe; but, more important, it is just what is needed to rouse Samson, and draw him on to form and utter, almost unawares, a hope—the first in the whole action. Harapha jeers:

> Presume not on thy God, whate'er he be,
> Thee he regards not, owns not, hath cut off
> Quite from his people, and delivered up
> Into thine Enemies' hand—

to be bound, blinded, imprisoned and set to labour, companion of the slave and ass. It is only what Samson himself has said before. Nor does he seek now to mitigate his fault or deny the justice of his punishment; but in his mounting anger at Harapha he gives back for insult defiance:

> All these indignities, for such they are
> From thine, these evils I deserve and, more,
> Acknowledge them from God inflicted on me
> Justly, yet despair not of his final pardon
> Whose ear is ever open; and his eye
> Gracious to readmit the suppliant;
> In confidence whereof I once again
> Defy thee to the trial of mortal fight,
> By combat to decide whose god is God,
> Thine or whom I with Israel's sons adore.
> (1156–77)

Nothing surely could be psychologically more true, or dramatically more effective. Samson, we remember, has reasserted his confidence in God; his remorse has become repentance, and he has sued for God's forgiveness; and but now, in the encounter with Dalila, he has stood firm: a deed has sealed his repentance and given a basis for returning confidence in himself. All this was necessary before the hope could be born that Samson might be indeed forgiven and, for one final exploit, be restored to God's service and the communion of his own people; but it was all latent, as it were, unrecognized by Samson himself. Till the hope was uttered, he did not dream that it existed: and utterance was born of the perfectly natural union of repentance and indignation.

Here, at length, is dawning the resolution necessary for Samson's last heroic act. The change is not too sudden or complete; but now to the passive desire for death is joined an active and more powerful motive. Harapha will seek vengeance for the scorn heaped upon him. Let him, says Samson, for

> come what may, my deadliest foe
> Will prove my speediest friend, by death to rid me hence,
> The worst that he can give, to me the best.
> Yet so it may fall out, because their end
> Is hate, not help to me, it may with mine
> Draw their own ruin who attempt the deed. (1262–7)

And this new resolution the Chorus instantly recognizes:

> Oh how comely it is and how reviving
> To the spirits of just men long oppress'd
> When God into the hands of their deliverer
> Puts invincible might. . . . (1268–71)

Samson, they feel, is once more doubly armed (and this is of crucial significance, as we shall see)—doubly armed with "celestial vigour" and with "plain heroic magnitude of mind" (1279–80).

In the second scene (1308–1444: Samson, Officer, Chorus), the summons arrives, and Samson, knowing his presence at a heathen festival unlawful, refuses: "I cannot come"; and then with mounting anger at the indignity designed him (for all thoughts of self have not been quenched): "I will not come," and again, "I will not come" (1321, 1332, 1342). But before the Officer returns, better thoughts have prevailed: the inner voice, so long silent, has spoken once more—the seal of Samson's restoration:

> I begin to feel
> Some rousing motions in me which dispose
> To something extraordinary my thoughts.
> I with this messenger will go along. . . .
>
> Happen what may, of me expect to hear
> Nothing dishonourable, impure, unworthy,
> Our God, our Law, my nation, or myself. . . .
> (1381–4, 1423–5)

And the Chorus replies:

> Go, and the Holy One
> Of Israel be thy guide. . . . (1427–8)

In Act V (1445–1758: Manoa, Messenger, Chorus), the futile counteraction, Manoa's effort to ransom his son, provides an overtone of pathos and a sustained note of irony, his narrative punctuated, from the main action, by shouts and the noise of ruin. The Messenger enters to recount the catastrophe; and Manoa and the Chorus comment antiphonally on Samson and his end.

It is of the first importance to observe that Samson's tragedy is considered, and the effect summed up, on the purely human level (1660–1744) before the Chorus is permitted to raise its eyes to the larger issue of the place of his sacrifice in God's providential plan, before it can determine that "All is best, though we oft doubt . . ." (1745–58). For this dual reference is not confined to the comments on the catastrophe. It extends to the whole situation and action. In an earlier reference to Samson's exploits, in the *Defence of the English People*, Milton had presented the alternative, "whether he acted in pursuance of a command from heaven or was prompted by his own valour." In the poem, the Chorus (as we have seen) recognizes Samson as doubly armed, with "celestial vigour" and "plain heroic magnitude of mind." The poet has found a way not to choose between the two views, but to combine and harmonize them. And of this we are reminded by Samson's attitude just before the last heroic effort: he stood "as one who pray'd / Or some great matter in his mind revolv'd" (1637–8): he was in fact doing both. Granted that the outcome is controlled by God's overruling power, and that his grace is operative from the first, though overtly so only as the catastrophe approaches, yet Samson's responses are at every point natural and humanly intelligible. If he is an instrument of Providence, he does not cease to be an individual, fallible, though corrigible, heroic—and by his own action doomed.

The effect of the final comments is at once to magnify Samson and to reconcile us to his fate: and this raises a problem. A common feature in all tragedies is a sense of disaster. A feature of very many is, at the end, some mitigation of this sense of disaster, some reconciling of the audience to the experience which they have witnessed and shared. This is true of many tragedies, but certainly not of all. We remember, for example, the grim closing words of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* ("Let no man be accounted happy till he has carried his happiness with him down to the grave"), nor could anyone, perhaps not Sophocles himself, foresee the consummation that awaited Oedipus at Colonus. Again, we remember how little of mitigation may attend the intervention of the god *ex machina*, as for example in the *Medea* of Euripides. In a word—despite some exceptions, such as Aeschylus' conclusion of the *Oresteia*—Greek tragedy generally leaves us with small ground for consolation or reassurance. But Greek tragedy, as we observed at the outset, is not necessarily the norm to which alone we should refer; and in Shakespeare the mitigation of our sense of disaster plays a larger part in the final effect, though it differs in kind and degree from play to play. There is the sense of a moral order vindicated and restored (*Macbeth*), of the task accomplished at whatever cost (*Hamlet*), of the transforming effect of suffering, as well as of death the deliverer (*Lear*), of a human heroism somehow greater than the entangling fate to which the hero succumbs (*Othello*, and indeed *Hamlet*); and finally there is a sense of life as something that goes on chastened by these experiences (the four tragedies). And of all these means, explicitly or by implication, Milton avails himself on the human level before invoking the providential:

> O dearly-bought revenge, yet glorious!
> Living or dying thou hast fulfill'd
> The work for which thou wast foretold
> To Israel, and now liest victorious
> Among thy slain, self-kill'd
> Not willingly, but tangl'd in the fold
> Of dire necessity, whose law in death conjoin'd
> Thee with thy slaughtered foes. . . . (1660–7)
>
> But he, though blind of sight,
> Despis'd and thought extinguish't quite,
> With inward eyes illuminated
> His fiery virtue rous'd
> From under ashes into sudden flame. . . .
>
> So virtue giv'n for lost,
> Deprest and overthrown, as seem'd,

Like that self-begotten bird
In the Arabian woods embost,
That no second knows nor third,
But lay erewhile a Holocaust,
From out her ashy womb now teem'd,
Revives, reflourishes, then active most
When most unactive deem'd,
And though her body die, her frame survives,
A secular bird, ages of lives. (1687–1707)

Come, come, no time for lamentation now,
Nor much more cause, Samson hath quit himself
Like Samson, and heroically hath finish'd
A life heroic. . . .
To Israel
Honour hath left, and freedom, let but them
Find courage to lay hold on this occasion,
To himself and Father's house eternal fame;
And which is best and happiest yet, all this
With God not parted from him, as was fear'd,
But favouring and assisting to the end.
Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail
Or knock the breast, no weakness, no contempt,
Dispraise or blame, nothing but well and fair
And what may quiet us in a death so noble.
(1708–24)

This reconciliation, this mitigating of the sense of disaster, is restricted to the human level, the level on which tragedy commonly moves (for the reference to God is in relation less to the outcome than to Samson's personal experience and feelings, and the image of the phoenix, which so often in Christian symbolism represents immortality, is carefully confined to the immortality of Samson's fame); and these considerations lead on to a first formulation of the tragic *katharsis* as Milton conceives it.

Only when this is accomplished is the Chorus allowed to raise its eyes to God's providential purpose and the place of Samson's sacrifice therein, and to correct, though not to deny, the doubts which have assailed it and Manoa and Samson himself. And since God's ways are just but also mysterious, acceptable by faith but often baffling to reason, the effect of the larger view is less to cancel than to confirm and complete the narrower, or so at least Milton's treatment would seem to say:

All is best, though we oft doubt
What th' unsearchable dispose
Of highest wisdom brings about,

And ever best found in the close.
Oft he seems to hide his face,
But unexpectedly returns
And to his faithful champion hath in place
Bore witness gloriously; whence Gaza mourns
And all that band them to resist
His uncontrollable intent.
His servants he with new acquist
Of true experience from this great event
With peace and consolation hath dismist
And calm of mind, all passion spent.
(1745–58)

And as if to confirm this reading of the lines, they again culminate in a formulation—perhaps the most famous in all literature—of the Aristotelian *katharsis*. Clearly Milton supposed that, with his basic Christian assumptions, he had still produced a genuinely tragic effect. Nor will the reader who clears his mind of prepossessions, and allows the poem to have its full effect, be likely to demur.

III

To say that *Samson Agonistes* is Milton's attempt to write a Christian tragedy is not to deny all relevance to his Greek models. It simply means that we must not expect divergent assumptions to issue in identical effects and must be willing to extend our terms of reference. Though many critics have followed Macaulay in asserting that Euripides is Milton's principal model, there seems to be singularly little ground for this opinion. In spirit his closest affinity is with Aeschylus, whose ethical and theological emphasis Milton can hardly have failed to appreciate, and who, in the *Oresteia*, re-reads an ancient and barbaric legend with all the insight of a profound moral and religious sensibility. In form, on the other hand, as Jebb recognizes (though his choice of the *Trachiniae* is not the happiest example) Sophocles is the chief model; and this is confirmed by Parker, who rightly chooses the *Oedipus at Colonus* as the closest of all Greek analogues. But the similarity in form, and up to a point in content, serves to underline the difference in spirit and effect.

Though standing somewhat apart from Sophocles' other works, and modifying the inferences to be drawn from them, the *Oedipus at Colonus* is his deliberately chosen conclusion, which supplies the mitigation wholly lacking in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*; and it must be read in the light of the whole story and of the Sophoclean outlook. That outlook, if we follow H. D. F. Kitto, posits a cosmic order encompassing and governing

the life of man. It is not a moral order such as Aeschylus presented as progressively realized; at most it subsumes such an order. Whoever runs athwart this cosmic order, whether wilfully or, like Oedipus, without intent, is (in Kitto's vivid image) like one who interrupts the flow of a powerful electric current, which destroys him and flows on. The gods have predicted, they have not decreed, the fate of Oedipus. Now he reaches Colonus, conscious that there he is to be released from suffering and the final prediction fulfilled. The prelude to this event is a series of encounters, much as in *Samson Agonistes*. The effect of these encounters is to magnify the figure of Oedipus from the blind and helpless wanderer of the opening scene to one of heroic proportions once more, with power to confer benefit and doom. In so far there is a parallel effect in Samson. But Oedipus' determination is not formed by these encounters: it is merely exhibited. Though (to steal a phrase from Dryden) it seems like treason in the court of Apollo to say it, the *Oedipus at Colonus* lies much more open to Johnson's charge than does *Samson Agonistes*: the action does not precipitate the catastrophe, as in Milton's tragedy it plainly does. Oedipus' reliance on divine prediction, and his determination to await its fulfilment at all hazards, had been already reached in the long interval since the ghastly revelations of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and especially in the year of wandering that had led at last to Colonus. Milton has chosen the much more difficult task of displaying in four acts a gradual change of mind in his hero comparable in extent to the whole development of Oedipus from the time when he stood before the palace blinded and desperate. The catastrophes, when at last they come, present some similarities: each hero goes to meet his end willingly and with a sense of fulfilment. But the effect in the two cases is very different. It must be so for dramatic reasons as well as philosophical—in the light, that is, not merely of the outlook of the two poets, but of the prior experiences of the two heroes. Oedipus has erred unwittingly: contemplating his deeds he has known an abyss of horror, but no remorse of conscience: his *hubris* perhaps supplied the trigger of the weapon that destroyed him, but certainly not the charge: and now he awaits release, as Samson has also done. But Samson's experience has been of a different order: he has sinned, been punished, and repented, and he has been miraculously restored to God's service. The *Oedipus at Colonus* ends in mystery, and, partly because the known reality is so intolerable, mystery is relief. *Samson Agonistes* ends in the transcending of mystery, and in something that is more like triumph than mere relief: death is indeed relief—but death is swallowed up in victory. Both plays announce an end to weeping and lamentation; but to realize to the full the difference, one has only to

place beside Milton's final chorus the final chorus of Sophocles (as it is movingly rendered by a recent translator):

> This is the end of tears:
> No more lament.
> Through all the years
> Immutable stands this event.

It would be hard to imagine any comment more noncommittal.

IV

Since ours is a purely inductive study, let us try a comparison with Shakespeare. At first glance no two tragedies could be more unlike than *Samson Agonistes* and *Hamlet*. In form (at least in the narrower sense of the term) they have nothing in common, and in content little enough. Each has as its basis a barbaric legend and a folk hero (as indeed have many of the great tragic themes including the *Oresteia* and the Oedipus plays), and in both *Hamlet* and *Samson Agonistes* (as also in the *Oresteia*) a dominant motive in the legend is revenge, which, as Bacon reminds us, is "a kind of wild justice." These legends and heroes the poets by their superior insight transform, so as to bring into relief a profounder and subtler human significance without wholly eliminating the basic primitive elements. It is when we come to the pattern of the action in *Hamlet* and *Samson Agonistes* that we strike what may turn out to be a clue. For without confusing poet with philosopher, or art with life, one may, and I think must, concede that the imagined action in such serious works of literature as these does in some way represent the poet's intuition of what life is, or on occasion may be, like. Now the common factor in the action of *Hamlet* and *Samson Agonistes* is that each hero is moving, however hesitantly or unwittingly, towards the fulfilment of his task and (for they are conjoined) towards his own doom. Not that the task (Hamlet's execution of justice or Samson's service of God) necessarily of itself entails the destruction of the hero. It does so because of the hero's own conduct, because, that is, of the interplay of free will and circumstances which together weave a web of necessity no less inexorable than that in which Oedipus is entangled. The heroes do not, like Oedipus in the *Tyrannus*, unconsciously run athwart the order of things; they do not, like Macbeth, defy the moral order or, like Edmund, call its mandate in question. On the contrary, they perish at last in giving effect to it. They are on the side of the power—the overruling power—which destroys them. Irony is of the very substance of tragedy; and this is the element of irony common to the two plays. In *Samson Agonistes* the

power is frankly identified as Providence. In *Hamlet* we detect at least in the hero a growing sense of a providential order: "There's a divinity that shapes our ends . . ."; "There's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow." Even if we interpret this as a purely subjective response on his part, it is apt to have some influence upon us; and even if it has not, there remains the pattern of action and the tragic irony which is inseparable from it.

These common features, which condition the kind of tragic effect achieved, spring from a common source, namely, the assumption, for the most part implicit in *Hamlet*, but much more explicit in *Samson Agonistes*, of a Christian view of man and the world. In *Hamlet* it is a Christian view of man in the order of nature, with no specific reference to grace: one could not, with any show of propriety or probability, speak of Hamlet's undergoing a religious experience. In *Samson Agonistes*, on the other hand, to miss the presence and purport of Samson's religious experience, and the silent operation of grace therein, is to but half read the play, and thus to throw it out of focus.

The greater precision, the more specific religious reference, in *Samson Agonistes* has a twofold result. First, it heightens the tragic irony of the catastrophe and, in retrospect, of the steady movement on towards it, for that movement is the very same as Samson's movement back towards God. Secondly, it supplies the ground of a more complete resolution, a stronger mitigation of the sense of disaster than is common in tragedy. In *Hamlet* the sense of disaster, though mitigated, is still predominant at the end; and Shakespeare does here what he does nowhere else: he looks, if only fleetingly, beyond the earthly scene, where the tragic action has worked itself out, to some resolution beyond it ("Good night, sweet Prince, / And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest"). From any such reference Milton has abstained, and critics have guessed at various explanations, including his mortalism; but the all-sufficient explanation is that tragic precedent was against it, and anyway it would have been superfluous.

v

The question has often been asked whether a Christian tragedy is really possible. No doubt on a total view Christianity presents the drama of existence as a divine comedy—or at most a divine tragi-comedy—in which the overruling power is the Supreme Goodness and whatever or whoever opposes it is finally eliminated. Whether their fate is in any negotiable sense tragic is a question that need not detain us: it no more arises than does the question whether in *Samson Agonistes* the fate of

the Philistines is tragic. If such a subject were ever given tragic treatment, it would have to be in a pagan, not a Christian context. If a Christian tragedy is possible, then its subject will be the saved, or those on the way to being saved, not the utterly lost. And clearly in the ample confines of the divine comedy there is plenty of room for tragic episodes. "I now must change / Those notes to tragic," writes Milton, as he introduces the subject of the first sin, and the first repentance, and their consequences. Christianity never denies the power of sin and suffering, though it envisages a final escape from them. In suffering, indeed, it discovers a new dimension. "Prosperity," said Bacon, "is the blessing of the Old Testament; adversity is the blessing of the New." This idea has entered deeply into the Christian consciousness, and not with the theologically minded alone: it receives its recognition not only in *Samson Agonistes*, but also, for example, in *Lear*, and even Cleopatra can say, "My desolation does begin to make / A better life." This is not theology: it is a profoundly true apprehension of one of the possibilities of human experience, on which Christianity has seized, and it is pregnant with drama, as Shakespeare knows and so does Milton.

Suffering may be the lot of either sinner or martyr, and Samson is both. He has sinned, and through suffering he has progressed to self-knowledge and repentance, the necessary prelude to readmission to God's service. But now God's service is martyrdom, if not precisely the usual kind. Patience, as the Chorus observes,

> is most oft the exercise
> Of saints, the trial of their fortitude,
> Making them each his own deliverer,
> And victor over all
> That tyranny or fortune can inflict.
> (1287–91)

This, however, is not the way of tragedy, and Samson is called upon to play a more active rôle: to be his own deliverer in a more literal sense and to achieve therewith a victory that dwarfs all his former triumphs. But suffering, though it may be a means of grace, is suffering still, and death, though it be the price of such a victory, and though it even come as a release from suffering, is still death. Thus some of the ingredients of tragedy are certainly available; and it only remains to be asked what the poet has been able to do with them. What Milton has done in respect of the action we have seen: he has made the way of repentance and restoration, the way back to God, also the way that leads inevitably to the catastrophe, and has thus achieved at a stroke the only kind of irony that is at once compatible with a Christian outlook and as potent as any

to be found in tragedy anywhere. Moreover, he has shown the necessity which thus conjoins Samson's salvation and victory with his death to be no arbitrary imposition of the overruling Power, but the outcome of Samson's conduct—of his sin and of his subsequent repentance. That his repentance is achieved under the impulsion of divine grace does not alter the fact that it is Samson's own. If God is present and operative in the tragedy (as he must be in a Christian view) at least he does not operate arbitrarily—or from a machine!

So much for the poem, if it stopped short with the catastrophe. It does not. The conclusion, as we have also seen, is directed wholly to reconciliation, to mitigating the sense of disaster: first on the human level, and, when that is completed, by invoking the overruling Power, by showing the place of Samson's sacrifice, of his whole experience, in the providential order of God, who does not force men's wills but nevertheless controls the event. The emphasis of this comment is justified not only on doctrinal but on artistic grounds. The very strength of the element of tragic irony in the action both permits and demands it. And the irony and the resolution of irony alike depend on the fact that this is a Christian tragedy: that is to say, a tragedy which, however scrupulously it adheres to classical conventions, is written unfalteringly from a Christian point of view.

Christian exegesis of the Samson story had developed different and sometimes mutually incompatible interpretations. Samson had been regarded as a repentant sinner who, by God's mercy, had been restored to his service. He had also, like Moses, Joshua, David, and others, been regarded as a prophetic type of Christ, and his sacrifice as a type of Christ's on the Cross. There can be no doubt that Milton builds his drama wholly on the former conception; and we need not complicate the question of the possibility of a Christian tragedy by introducing the latter view.

In that possibility Milton, clearly, believed; but his artist's intuition taught him that it could be realized only under certain conditions. The first was the provision of a strong element of tragic irony in the pattern of the action. The second was a resolution of that irony by a final appeal to God's providential order, to the rhythm as it were of the divine comedy. Nor was this all. If one was to achieve an effect truly tragic, one must focus attention on the hero, and must so present his response to the outward pressures of circumstance, and the inward impulsions of grace, as to render that response intelligible in purely human terms. And here Milton's former sense of a dichotomy in Samson's motivation came to his aid; only now it presented itself not as a pair of alternatives but as

two forces working to a common end: "celestial vigour" *and* "plain heroic magnitude of mind." The sense of Samson as heroic individual does not stop short with the catastrophe: it extends to the comment. The reconciliation, the mitigating of the sense of disaster, is worked out in purely human terms before the larger rhythm of the divine comedy is invoked, lest that rhythm should not only resolve the tragic irony of the action, but dissolve the whole tragic effect.

Since I have been considering *Samson Agonistes* as a Christian tragedy, I have inevitably dwelt upon the view of life implied as conditioning the kind of tragic effect achieved. This does not mean that I am overlooking, or relegating to second place, the distinguishable, though inseparable, contribution of the poem's form. I have in fact been silently taking it into account in every statement made and every line of the poem quoted. But it is proper that, at the end, this element of poetic form should receive overt recognition. Kitto remarks that the form which Sophocles imposes upon the Oedipus legend is a reflection and reinforcement of the whole Sophoclean view of life. And what is true of Sophocles is no less true of Milton. Every great poet adapts form to content in his own way. But the basic classical structure common to Milton and Sophocles is peculiarly effective because the framework which it supplies for every subtlety of insight and modification still retains its beautiful clarity and its insistent suggestion of inevitability. Here the true importance of Milton's adoption of his Greek models finally lies. It is not that he is seeking to reproduce their spirit and effect—far from it—but that he is adapting their means, to present and produce his own. To say that *Samson Agonistes* is a classical tragedy with a Christian theme and outlook does not completely define the effect or the means used to attain it; but it puts us, I think, on the right track. It gives us a point of view from which to read and judge the poem.

NOTES

1 To avoid a multiplicity of notes, the line references to *Samson Agonistes* are supplied in brackets. The critical works alluded to are in order of occurrence: Sir Richard Jebb, "*Samson Agonistes* and Hellenic Drama," *Proceedings of the British Academy* (1907–8); W. R. Parker, "The Greek Spirit in Milton's *Samson Agonistes*," *Essays and Studies of the English Association*, XX (1935), 21–44; my own "*Samson Agonistes* and Milton's Experience," *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, ser. 3, vol. XLIII (1949), Section II, pp. 157–75; D. C. Allen, *The Harmonious Vision* (1953), chap. IV; H. D. F. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy* (1954). The translator of Sophocles referred to is E. F. Walling, in his *Sophocles' Theban Plays* (1947).

HOW CAN BERKELEY BE REFUTED?

Robert McRae

Berkeley's theory about the physical world has for many the appearance of an extreme and very ingenious paradox. For this reason it has more often prompted the question "How can it be refuted?" than any other theory in the history of philosophy. Whiston, Newton's successor at Cambridge, and one of the first to whom Berkeley sent a copy of his *Principles*, appealed in vain to the most distinguished philosopher in England to find a refutation. "I went to Dr. Clarke," he says, "and discoursed with him about it to this effect, that I, being not a metaphysician, was not able to answer Mr. Berkeley's subtle premises, though I did not at all believe his absurd conclusion. I therefore desired that he, who was deep in such subtleties, but did not appear to believe Mr. Berkeley's conclusion, would answer him, which task he declined." Perhaps, as Boswell thought, it was hopeless to try. He was so impressed by the ingenuity of Berkeley's "sophistry" that he told Dr. Johnson it was impossible to refute it.

In the two and a half centuries since the publication of the *Principles* and the *Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* various attempts at refutation have been made. The mere fact of the diversity of the methods employed gives rise to the question: which, if any of them, represents the proper way of refuting a philosophical theory? It may perhaps be instructive to look at four of the best known of these attempts with this question in mind. Each happens to represent a totally different conception of how the task is to be performed.

We can see from the way that Whiston put the question to Clarke what he considered to be involved in the refutation of a philosophical theory. As a mathematician it was not unnatural for him to suppose that such a theory was a conclusion resting on a proof. If he is correct in supposing this to be the case, then refutation could consist in showing that the premisses of the demonstration were false, or in showing that

there was a logical fallacy in the steps of inference from premisses to conclusion, or, thirdly, in finding a proof for the contrary of the theory in question, and thereby showing it to be false. The last of these methods is employed by Dr. Johnson and by Kant. They pay no attention to any so-called premisses or inferences in Berkeley's arguments; they merely prove the contrary of his thesis. Since, however, Dr. Johnson's proof took the form of an action, accompanied only by the words, "I refute it thus," there is room for too much speculation as to what the import of his action was, and we shall be on safer ground in looking only at the example given by Kant of this kind of refutation. Showing a logical fallacy in the proof is the method employed by Professor R. B. Perry in refuting Berkeley. There are two other methods of refutation employed against Berkeley which do not concern themselves with proof; that is to say, they neither seek to refute him by proving a contrary thesis nor seek any logical fallacy in his proofs. One of these is Professor G. E. Moore's. It is the method of analysis. The other is Hume's. Like Whiston, Hume regards Berkeley's theory as resting on a proof, but like Boswell and unlike Whiston, he is quite prepared to regard this proof as impeccable, and he makes no attempt to controvert it. The weapon to be used against the theory is one which would destroy it by destroying all philosophical theory. This is the most radical species of refutation that is possible, and with it we may begin.

Hume's starting point is the fact that Berkeley's theory is unbelievable. Berkeley's arguments, he says, "*admit of no answer and produce no conviction*. Their only effect is to cause that momentary amazement and irresolution and confusion, which is the result of scepticism."[1] Hume's statement seems to carry all the weight of common sense. It is still quoted as though, taken by itself, it gives a sufficient case for condemning Berkeley. But plainly it is not enough. We still have to ask why the sheer fact of incredibility should possess an authority superior to a faultless argument, and to this question Hume had an answer. Indeed, a very large part of Hume's proposed revolution in philosophy involved an inquiry into the nature of belief. One of his principal discoveries was that belief is not an attitude which the mind adopts when it is confronted by evidence or seeming evidence. Belief has no grounds or reasons; it has only causes. It is not a subject belonging to the epistemologist; it belongs solely to the psychologist. In Hume's own words, "Belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cogitative part of our nature."[2] In attributing it to the sensitive part of our nature he means that "belief is some sensation"—and he adds, appropriately to this

classification of it—"which 'tis impossible for mere ideas and reflections to destroy."[3] Whenever this sensation is caused in accordance with the laws governing such natural phenomena, no grounds or reasons for *thinking* the contrary can alter the belief. "Thus the sceptic . . . must assent to the principle concerning the existence of body, tho' he cannot pretend by any arguments of philosophy to maintain its veracity. Nature has not left this to his choice, and has doubtless esteem'd it an affair of too great importance to be trusted to our uncertain reasonings and speculations. We may well ask, *What causes induce us to believe in the existence of body*? but 'tis vain to ask, *Whether there be body or not*? That is a point, which we must take for granted in all our reasonings."[4]

Hume's theory of belief has a consequence which is at least as momentarily amazing as anything he saw in Berkeley, for it commits him to saying that he does not *believe* what he *knows*. He *believes* in the existence of bodies, and by bodies he means, he tells us, objects that continue to exist when they are not being perceived, and whose existence is independent of their being perceived. At the same time he also professes to *know* that there are no such objects, to know, that is, that Berkeley is right. He considers that very little indeed is required to show that the objects of perception have no existence independent of their being perceived, and he is almost embarrassed in repeating the standard arguments which must be so familiar to all his readers.

Reduced to its simplest terms, Hume's refutation consists in showing that there can be no reasons for believing Berkeley's theory because there are no such things as reasons for believing anything. The same argument that Hume seeks to apply against Berkeley's theory applies, however, first of all to his own theory of belief. It destroys itself before it can destroy anything else. If there are no reasons for believing Berkeley's theory, neither are there any reasons for believing this to be so.

Hume may be prepared to regard Berkeley's theory as true; its other three critics are not. For them it is false. And if it is false, it seems plausible to suppose with Whiston that there must be something wrong with the proof or proofs on which it rests. This is the supposition on which Professor Perry has proceeded, and the supposition determines the form of his refutation.[5] He begins by taking Berkeley's *esse* is *percipi* and reformulating it as the assertion that it is essential and not accidental to the thing I perceive that it be perceived. It is this proposition which, he says, Berkeley has to prove. The reformulated proposition can be recognized as belonging to the familiar type for which the logic of

induction is concerned with finding proofs. If, as Professor Perry says, this is the proposition which Berkeley has to prove, then we are immediately committed by it to judging Berkeley's arguments as inductive proofs. When looked at as such they are easily shown by Professor Perry to contain logical fallacies. They sin against Mill's canons of induction. Berkeley's theory has, in effect, been condemned as bad empirical science.

Empirical science, however, is not what it purports to be. Whether or not Mill's canons of induction represent the method of proof used in the empirical sciences, they are not the method of argument used in philosophy. Philosophical argument differs in the first place from the arguments of either the inductive and empirical sciences or the deductive and mathematical sciences in not being a method of proof at all. Having neither the observed data of the empirical sciences nor the accepted definitions, axioms, and postulates of mathematics, it lacks the logical foundations essential to proof or disproof. Consequently, if refuting a philosophical theory means disproving it, no philosophical theories are ever refuted.

If we look at Berkeley's first and principal argument for *esse* is *percipi*, we can see that it is something quite different from proof. The conclusion of this argument is "that all the choir of heaven and furniture of the earth, in a word all those bodies which compose the mighty frame of the world, have not any subsistence without a mind, that their *being* is to be perceived or known; that consequently so long as they are not actually perceived by me, or do not exist in my mind or that of any other created spirit, they must have either no existence at all, or else subsist in the mind of some Eternal Spirit."[6] While this is the conclusion of an argument it is not the conclusion of a proof. On the contrary Berkeley describes it as one of those truths that "are so near and obvious to the mind that a man need only open his eyes to see them." It can, he says, be made to appear "with all the light and evidence of an Axiom." Or, again, that the *esse* of the objects of sense is *percipi* is something of which "an intuitive knowledge may be obtained."[7] Obviously it is not proofs that are sought for axioms or what can be immediately seen. Whatever argument Berkeley produces can have as its purpose only to direct the attention to what can be immediately seen, not to prove it. The crux of the argument is contained in the following paragraph.

> That neither our thoughts, nor passions, nor ideas formed by the imagination, exist without the mind, is what everybody will allow. And it seems no less evident that the various sensations or ideas imprinted on the sense,

however blended or combined together (that is, whatever objects they compose), cannot exist otherwise than in a mind perceiving them.—I think an intuitive knowledge may be obtained of this by any one that shall attend to what is meant by the term *exist* when applied to sensible things. The table I write on I say exists, that is, I see and feel it; and if I were out of my study I should say it existed—meaning thereby that if I was in my study I might perceive it, or that some other spirit actually does perceive it. There was an odour, that is, it was smelt; there was a sound, that is, it was heard; a colour or figure, and it was perceived by sight or touch. This is all I can understand by these and the like expressions. For as to what is said of the absolute existence of unthinking things without any relation to their being perceived, that seems perfectly unintelligible. Their *esse* is *percipi*, nor is it possible they should have any existence out of the minds of thinking things which perceive them.[8]

Berkeley makes it clear that in this argument he is not concerned merely with the way in which we use language, nor is he engaged in the observation of empirical fact. It is our "thoughts" that we are examining, with a view to making them clear to ourselves. "To be convinced," he says, of *esse* is *percipi* "the reader need only reflect, and try to separate in his own thoughts the *being* of a sensible thing from its *being perceived*,"[9] or, as this passage is rendered in the first edition, "To make this appear with all the light and evidence of an Axiom, it seems sufficient if I can but awaken the reflexion of the reader, that he may take an impartial view of his own meaning, and turn his thoughts upon the subject itself, free and disengaged from all embarras of words and prepossession in favour of received mistakes."

Whiston looked in vain, then, for someone to find the error in the premisses of Berkeley's argument, for it has no premisses. It is equally vain for Perry to look for logical fallacies in his proof, for this argument is not proof but a different kind of thing.

Kant's refutation, like Perry's, involves the notion of proof, but it also involves another element which deserves examination. It is a matter of doubt whether Kant had any direct acquaintance with Berkeley's philosophy. Certainly in his "Refutation of Idealism" he was unconcerned with Berkeley's arguments.[10] Berkeley interested him only as maintaining a certain thesis. Kant puts his refutation in the quasi-mathematical form frequently used by philosophers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It consists of the statement of a thesis followed by its proof. The thesis is one which Kant takes to be the contrary of that maintained by idealists, including Berkeley.

If, as the quasi-mathematical form of argument suggests, a philosophical theory is, like a mathematical proposition, merely the *conclu-*

sion of an argument, then, perhaps it might, if false, be refuted without any account being taken of the arguments on which it is alleged to rest. It would be necessary only to find an argument for the contrary thesis. This is the procedure which Kant has adopted in refuting Berkeley's theory. But this abstraction of conclusion from argument and the identification of the theory with the conclusion alone is not possible in dealing with philosophical theories, for there can be no understanding of a philosophical theory except through the arguments by which it has been developed, and without those arguments it is a meaningless abstraction. Although Kant adopted the quasi-mathematical mode of refutation no one has been more emphatic than he in asserting that the method of philosophy is not the same as the method of mathematics. The definitions of philosophical concepts, he maintained, have to be identified with the entire exposition by which they are clarified. Where a mathematician must begin with definitions, since it is only through them that he gets his concepts, a philosopher on the other hand works towards definitions. What he begins with are concepts which at first exist for him only in a confused state, and definition in all its clarity and precision comes at the end of his inquiry. All the steps of the inquiry are therefore necessary for the clear explanation of philosophical concepts, or, in Kant's words, "the incomplete exposition must precede the complete." For reasons which he himself has admirably stated, it is fatal to Kant's refutation, in so far as it purports to embrace Berkeley's theory, that he takes no account of Berkeley's arguments, the arguments by which he developed his conception of the externality of objects and of the distinction between the real and the illusory within experience. When we do take them into account it becomes evident that it is not Berkeley's theory, but something else, which Kant is refuting.

For convenience we may consider a simpler case than the present one, namely Spinoza's assertion that there is only one substance and Leibniz's assertion that there are an infinite number of substances. Both doctrines rest on arguments. Let us suppose—contrary to what happened, for he was a good dialectician—that Leibniz had used the same procedure in refuting Spinoza as Kant used in refuting Berkeley, that is to say, that he had proved it to be false that there is only one substance, and that in his proof he had given no consideration to the arguments by which Spinoza or anyone else had worked out his conception of substance. We should then have to say that the substance to which he was referring, when he showed that there could not be just one, was not Spinoza's but only his own. He would not, therefore,

have been refuting Spinoza. Moreover, if the arguments of Leibniz's theory of substance are to be regarded as entailing a refutation of Spinoza's, no less so are the arguments of Spinoza's theory to be regarded as entailing a refutation of Leibniz's. But refutations which are mutual are not refutations.

G. E. Moore's "Refutation of Idealism" contains the most celebrated of all refutations of Berkeley. If we look in it for anything possessing the formal character of a proof that the proposition *esse* is *percipi* is false, it can be found. But this proof is a very insignificant element in his argument. The proof contains two premisses: (1) "A sensation is, in reality, a case of 'knowing' or 'being aware of' or 'experiencing' something";[11] (2) the object of any kind of awareness is independent of our being aware of it. The real work of Moore's argument, however, does not consist in the trivial act of making the deduction from these premisses to the conclusion that the *esse* of colours and sounds is not *percipi*. It consists in establishing these premisses, and this is done by what Moore continuously refers to in his "Refutation" as an analysis. The general characteristics of this kind of argument are to be found in the opening section of his analysis of sensation.

> We all know that the sensation of blue differs from that of green. But it is plain that if both are *sensations* they also have some point in common. What is it that they have in common? And how is this common element related to the points in which they differ?
>
> I will call the common element "consciousness" without yet attempting to say what the thing I so call *is*. We have then in every sensation two distinct terms, (1) "consciousness," in respect of which all sensations are alike; and (2) something else, in respect of which one sensation differs from another. It will be convenient if I may be allowed to call this second term the "object" of a sensation: this also without yet attempting to say what I mean by the word.
>
> We have then in every sensation two distinct elements, one which I call consciousness and another which I call the object of consciousness. This must be so if the sensation of blue and the sensation of green, though different in one respect, are alike in another: blue is one object of sensation and green is another, and consciousness, which both sensations have in common, is different from either.[12]

Moore's analysis consists in making a distinction between two things, which, he maintains, have been confused with one another. Idealism rests on the failure to see this distinction: blue has been identified by the idealist with the sensation of blue. Now it is evident that in this argument of Moore's there is nothing that can be called proof that sensation contains the two distinguishable elements (1) consciousness and (2) ob-

ject. Let it be granted with Moore, that the sensation of blue and the sensation of green are alike in one respect and differ in another. There are still no grounds given for saying that that in which they agree is in their both being forms of "consciousness," and that that in which they differ, the blue and the green of sensation, is the "object" of this consciousness. Yet in the passage quoted Moore says, "*This must be so* if the sensation of blue and the sensation of green, though different in one respect, are alike in another." And in the paragraph immediately following, Moore is confident enough to say, "*knowing, as we now do,* that the sensation of blue includes two different elements, namely consciousness and blue." Later, in reverting to this point, he speaks of it as "established." Moore's confidence rests on only one thing, namely on the conviction that when he looks he directly *sees* that there are these two elements. To point out that there is in his argument no proof, but only something directly seen, is not to question the validity of his procedure, but only to show what kind of thing his analysis is. It is by this method of looking and seeing that he arrives at his first premiss, "A sensation is, in reality, a case of 'knowing' or 'being aware of' or 'experiencing' something."

As his analysis progresses towards the second premiss it becomes evident that it too is got by direct seeing. The main argument is contained in the following passage:

> Idealists admit that some things really exist of which they are not aware. . . . They further hold that some of the things of which they are sometimes aware do really exist, even when they are not aware of them. . . . They are, therefore, sometimes aware of something which is *not* an inseparable aspect of their own experience. . . . And what my analysis of sensation has been designed to show is, that whenever I have a mere sensation or idea, the fact is that I am then aware of something which is equally and in the same sense *not* an inseparable aspect of my experience. The awareness which I have maintained to be included in sensation is the very same unique fact which constitutes every kind of knowledge: "blue" is as much an object . . . of my experience, when I experience it, as the most exalted and independent real thing of which I am ever aware. There is, therefore, no question of how we are to "get outside the circle of our own ideas and sensations." Merely to have a sensation is already to *be* outside that circle. It is to know something which is as truly and really *not* a part of *my* experience, as anything which I can ever know.[13]

What Moore is requiring us to see here, and see directly, is the nature of the relation "being aware of," and to see that it is exactly the same, whether the awareness is a sensation of blue or awareness of some other kind of object admittedly independent of our being aware of it.

Whatever the merits of Moore's analysis, it will be recognized that it has the same general character as Berkeley's argument for *esse* is *percipi*. Berkeley says that if we attend carefully to what we mean when we say "there is a colour" we see that it involves "it is seen." Both Berkeley and Moore appear to be engaged in the same activity of seeking to form a clear conception of certain objects. If we are to believe Moore, Berkeley is wrong through a failure in his analysis of sensation. He has failed to distinguish between the two elements, sensation as knowledge and colour as object of knowledge. He has failed to look carefully enough.

Does Berkeley stand refuted at last? To begin with, we may ask, is it true that Berkeley was guilty of confusion, of a failure of analysis? Did he fail to recognize that since sensation is a form of awareness, then, of course, its object, what we know, the colour or sound, is independent of our knowing it? Is it a simple case of Berkeley regarding sensation as a form of knowing, just as Moore does, but not seeing as Moore does, the implications of its being a form of knowing? On examination the case turns out to be not so simple as this.

The assertion that the *esse* of colours and sounds is *percipi* is, it is true, incompatible with the assertion that the perception of colours and sounds is a form of knowledge. But the question is, which, if either, of these assertions is true. For just as we can argue that if sense perception is a form of knowing, then the *esse* of colours and sounds is not *percipi*, so also we can argue that if the *esse* of colours and sounds is *percipi*, then sense perception cannot be a form of knowing. Berkeley's confusion consists in accepting at the same time, at least initially, the two incompatible assertions. In the opening statements of the *Principles* he lists among the objects of *knowledge* the "ideas actually imprinted on the senses," for example, "light and colours," "hard and soft, heat and cold," etc.[14] He also appears to use the expression "being perceived" as the equivalent of "being known" when he says that the "being [of all the choir of heaven and furniture of the earth] is to be perceived or known." But Berkeley was later to deny, with great emphasis, that sensation is a form of knowing. In the *Siris* he says, "As understanding perceiveth not . . . so sense knoweth not . . . sense or soul, so far forth as sensitive, knoweth nothing."[15] Thus, of the two incompatible assertions, it is, we must conclude, *esse* is *percipi* which remains fundamental for Berkeley. It is the conception of sensation as a form of knowing which he is prepared to sacrifice.

From this it can be seen that Moore has not refuted Berkeley at all.

His argument shows itself in the end to be merely a contradiction of Berkeley. And contradiction, not refutation, is all that can be got from two independently pursued analyses, whose results are contrary. Moore, as a result of his analysis, professes to see what kind of thing sensation is. The element of consciousness in it, he says, "*can* be distinguished if we look attentively enough. . . . My main object . . . has been to make the reader *see* it."[16] But Berkeley, doing the same thing as Moore, that is, looking attentively, sees something quite inconsistent with what Moore saw. Nor is he alone. Others acquainted with Moore's analysis, as Berkeley was not, nevertheless still profess to see what Berkeley saw to be the *esse* of colours and sounds. What alternative is there to such contradiction? It may be that the alternative is not refutation, but that sort of continuous dialogue whose methods are ancient and traditional in philosophy, whether there be involved in it a Thrasymachus and a Socrates, a Gassendi and a Descartes, a Leibniz and a Clarke, a Hylas and Philonous, or only the philosopher and himself.

NOTES

1 David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Selby-Bigge (Oxford, 1902), 155 n.
2 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. Selby-Bigge (Oxford, 1896), 183.
3 *Ibid.*, 184.
4 *Ibid.*, 187.
5 R. B. Perry, *Present Philosophical Tendencies* (New York, 1929), chap. VI.
6 George Berkeley, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, § 6.
7 *Ibid.*, § 3.
8 *Ibid.*
9 *Ibid.*, § 6.
10 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 275 ff.
11 G. E. Moore, *Philosophical Studies* (London, 1922), 24.
12 *Ibid.*, 17.
13 *Ibid.*, 26f.
14 Berkeley, *Principles*, § 1.
15 George Berkeley, *Siris*, § 305.
16 Moore, *Philosophical Studies*, 25.

BROWNING'S "THE STATUE AND THE BUST"

W. O. Raymond

With the possible exception of *Fifine at the Fair,* there is no other poem of Browning whose ethics have provoked such controversy as "The Statue and the Bust." The two poems have frequently been linked both in hostile criticism and in eulogy. In the *Scottish Art Review* for December 1889, Mr. Mortimer asserted that *Fifine at the Fair* and "The Statue and the Bust" showed that Browning "prescribes action at any price, even that of defying the restrictions of the moral law." Swinburne, on the other hand, enthusiastically admired both works. Lord Bryce has recorded how at a meeting of the Old Mortality Society in Swinburne's rooms at Oxford in 1858, the Pre-Raphaelite poet "repeated, or rather chanted, to his friends, a few of Browning's poems, in particular 'The Statue and the Bust,' 'The Heretic's Tragedy,' and 'Bishop Blougram's Apology.' "[1] Again, shortly after the publication of *Fifine at the Fair*, Swinburne said, "This is far better than anything Browning has yet written. Here is his true province."[2]

In one respect, at least, the ethical problem involved in "The Statue and the Bust" was more disquieting to many of Browning's Victorian readers than that in *Fifine at the Fair.* In *Fifine*, Don Juan is the speaker throughout, and his defence of his immoral delinquencies could be interpreted as the utterances of a libertine casuist rather than the poet's own sentiments. But in "The Statue and the Bust," although Browning is relating an old legend, "this story . . . our townsmen tell," the comment is his own; and, moreover, in the last verses he defends his poem against the criticism which he foresees it will evoke and definitely states his personal convictions. This defence at once differentiates "The Statue and the Bust" from the so-called casuistical monologues of Browning, such as "Bishop Blougram's Apology," "Mr. Sludge, 'The Medium,' " *Fifine at the Fair*, and *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau.* If there is casuistry in the ethical thesis of "The Statue and the Bust" it is

casuistry in which the poet himself is directly involved; it cannot be palmed off as the dramatic sentiments of any imaginary characters. What may be called the Epilogue to "The Statue and the Bust" is therefore of special importance. Although the dramatic disguise is very thin in many of Browning's monologues, it is seldom that he casts it off altogether and avowedly speaks in his own person.

In the body of the poem, the two lovers are criticized for the procrastination and infirmity of will which prevented them from eloping and gratifying their unlawful love. Does the poet then maintain that adultery may be laudable under certain circumstances? It is this charge which Browning strives to defend himself against in the Epilogue. At its outset he voices the foreseen adverse criticism.

> I hear you reproach, "But delay was best,
> For their end was a crime."

The reference to adultery as a *crime* is in itself significant as an evidence that Browning does not condone it. He then proceeds with his defence. What he singles out and dwells upon is the weakness and cowardice of the lovers' procrastination and lack of resolution. Had they repented of their sinful passion and been deterred from eloping by moral considerations, he would have commended them. But they were deterred only through lack of courage and the fear of worldly consequences. Their sinful motives and desires, the lust of their hearts, remained unchanged. Consequently the poet holds that they simply added to their original sin the vice of procrastination.

The method of Browning's argument in this poem may be illustrated by a comparison between it and the Biblical parable of the Unjust Steward. After his dismissal from his position, the steward set about making friends for himself by dishonestly reducing the bills owed by his master's clients. Then we read: "And the Lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely." Are we to assume that Christ's teaching was that the steward was to be praised on account of his dishonesty? It is clearly the energy, pains, and forethought of the steward in securing friends for himself after his dismissal which are singled out for commendation, abstracted, so to speak, from his dishonesty. His diligence and sagacity are contrasted with the slothfulness and ineptness of people whose ends are moral, but who are lukewarm, half-hearted, and negligent in their pursuit of these. "The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." What Browning says, in effect, in the concluding verses of "The Statue and the

Bust" is that he has illustrated the weakness of procrastination, "the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin," through characters who were sinful rather than virtuous. Finally, in the last two lines of the poem, with a swift probing thrust, he rounds upon people who plume themselves upon their virtue but are slothful in pursuing it:

> You of the virtue (we issue join)
> How strive you? *De te, fabula.*

Yet the ethical problem of the poem is not fully solved by Browning's concentration on the weakness of procrastination and infirmity of will. He has to defend his ethics on two grounds, the one specific, the other general.

In the first place he has maintained that the Duke and the Lady are as guilty in cherishing their unlawful love as they would have been had they committed the crime of adultery. He judges them by their motives, and in this respect we are reminded of Christ's words in the Sermon on the Mount: "But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." It is characteristic of Browning that he lays such stress on inner motive, and that he should be primarily concerned with the soul of the individual rather than with the individual in his nexus of social relationships. Throughout his poetry the worth of the individual is estimated not by outward achievement, but by aim and motivation. Often, as in "A Grammarian's Funeral," he extols characters whose worldly accomplishment has amounted to little, in order to throw into relief the loftiness of their aspiration. As he writes in "Rabbi Ben Ezra":

> For hence,—a paradox
> Which comforts while it mocks,—
> Shall life succeed in that it seems to fail:
> What I aspired to be,
> And was not comforts me. . . .

There is a sharp contrast between Browning's judgment of the Duke and the Lady and their position in the eyes of the law. From a legal point of view the secret love of the two would have escaped censure. The law, which is concerned with individuals as members of society, would not have condemned them until they had actually committed adultery. From an individualistic standpoint the poet is justified in regarding sin in motive as quite as culpable as sin in act. Yet it may be asked whether, since man is a social animal, it is entirely legitimate to abstract him from the society which helps largely to shape and mould

him, and of which he is an organic part. Can an open violation of the restraints imposed by the standards, codes, even the conventions, of civilized society, the translation of sinful thought into act, fail to enhance individual guilt? As Berdoe puts it in his comment on "The Statue and the Bust": "If every woman flew to the arms of the man whom she liked better than her own husband, and if every governor of a city felt himself at liberty to steal another man's wife merely to complete and perfect the circle of his own delights, society would seem to be thrown back into barbarism."[3]

In the specific instance of "The Statue and the Bust," Browning has maintained that if motives are evil, it is better to act on these with vigour and resolution, than to be deterred by weakness of will and cowardice. It is, however, his generalization of this into a universal standard of conduct which has provoked most hostile criticism:

> Stake your counter as boldly every whit,
> Venture as warily, use the same skill,
> Do your best, whether winning or losing it.
>
> If you choose to play!—is my principle.
> Let a man contend to the uttermost
> For his life's set prize, be what it will!

It is clear that to the poet the most hopeless state of human nature is that of indifference and inaction. As Henry Jones has written: "It is under the guise of warfare that morality always presents itself to Browning."[4] The development of man's soul can be achieved only through conflict. Therefore, let truth and falsehood, good and evil grapple:

> No, when the fight begins within himself,
> A man's worth something. God stoops o'er his head,
> Satan looks up between his feet,—both tug—
> He's left himself, i' the middle: the soul awakes
> And grows. . . .
> ("Bishop Blougram's Apology," 693–7)

In view of the supreme importance of the moral conflict, to evade it is, in a sense, the worst of sins. It is better, Browning holds, to act evilly than to lapse into atrophy of soul.

The situation in "The Statue and the Bust" is one of many illustrations in Browning's poetry of the importance he attaches to a climactic moment in the lives of individuals. In the "Epilogue" to *Dramatis Personae* he represents the spiritual powers of the universe as concentrating in some critical moment on the life of every man to challenge him to an

all-important decision involving not merely temporal but eternal consequences. On a person's response or lack of response to this challenge his destiny depends. An individual at this crux is like a point of "central rock" in "Arctic seas" towards which all the waters converge for a moment before they "hasten off to play elsewhere." In "Cristina" Browning writes of moments

> When the spirit's true endowments
> Stand out plainly from the false ones
> And apprise it if pursuing
> Or the right way or the wrong way
> To its triumph or undoing.

In the majority of instances this is what Browning calls "the good minute." His poems dealing with it fall into two classes. In the first, the good choice which the moment offers is made, and the result is beneficent. In the second, the good choice is missed or neglected, and the result is baneful. A fine example of the first class is the happy choice of the lovers in the beautiful semi-dramatic lyric "By the Fireside." The heaven-sent opportunity of the "moment one, and infinite" is grasped, the positive decision made, and the fruitage is eternal.

> I am named and known by that moment's feat;
> There took my station and degree;
> So grew my own small life complete,
> As nature obtained her best of me—
> One born to love you sweet!

Finally, in "By the Fireside," as in "The Statue and the Bust," Browning generalizes a specific incident in order to stress a general truth:

> How the world is made for each of us!
> How all we perceive and know in it
> Tends to some moment's product thus,
> When a soul declares itself—to wit,
> By its fruit, the thing it does!

"Dîs Aliter Visum" and "Youth and Art" exemplify the second class of Browning's poems dealing with "the good minute," in which the failure to use its opportunities is disastrous. These poems are complementary to "By the Fireside" in that they are concerned with the destiny of potential lovers at a crucial moment of their lives, but contrasted in the results that ensue. Love is blasted by a failure, through weakness of will and worldly prudence, to act, and the lives of the lovers are irretrievably marred. As the woman in "Youth and Art" laments:

Each life unfulfilled, you see;
It hangs still, patchy and scrappy:
We have not sighed deep, laughed free,
Starved, feasted, despaired,—been happy. . . .

This could but have happened once,
And we missed it, lost it for ever.

Neither of these poems involves any ethical problem. It is indisputable that a failure to achieve a good end because of unworthy motives is morally wrong and culpable.

There are, however, in "The Statue and the Bust" and other poems of Browning, climactic moments of another order than that of "the good minute." In these, if the opportunities are embraced, the end is a crime not a virtue. Yet the poet holds that if a failure to grasp them is due only to infirmity of will, cowardice, or procrastination, and not to any moral restraint, it would be better for the sinners to act with decision and energy, and commit the contemplated crime. As Dr. Westcott writes of Browning's ethical teaching: "No room is left for indifference or neutrality. . . . A part must be taken and maintained. The spirit in which Luther said 'Pecca fortiter' finds in him powerful expression."[5]

In the poem "Before," the speaker maintains that even for the wrongdoer in a quarrel it would be preferable to fight the issue out in a duel rather than add cowardice to his guilt by avoiding it. Even in the event of his being the victor, there is more hope that remorse of conscience will ultimately redeem him than if he had shrunk from accepting the challenge:

Better sin the whole sin, sure that God observes;
Then go live his life out! life will try his nerves. . . .

And the price appears that pays for the misfeasance.

In "Too Late," where again the lives of a man and woman are ruined by a failure to avow love, the man declares that even violent action to take possession of "Edith" would have been worthier than his inaction:

Why better even have burst like a thief
And borne you away to a rock for us two,
In a moment's horror, bright, bloody, and brief.

In "The Worst of It," the sin of the woman in being false to her husband ultimately becomes the means of his redemption. In "The Lost Leader," the speaker maintains that it would be better for the leader, after his defection from the people's cause, to follow his wrongful course with

energy and decision rather than to vacillate weakly and return to the party he has betrayed:

> Best fight on well, for we taught him—strike gallantly,
> Menace our heart ere we master his own. . . .

In Browning's defence of his ethical standards in "The Statue and the Bust," the argument of the poems I have been considering is definitively summed up:

> Let a man contend to the uttermost
> For his life's set prize, be what it will!

It is the poet's fervent stress on action, and above all on action as preferable to inaction, if the latter is due to unworthy motives, even when the end pursued is immoral, which has been assailed. At the same time there is a distrust, and indeed a dislike, of Browning's aggressive and unqualified emotional optimism, and a conviction of the inadequacy of his concept of evil. A portion of this criticism is, it seems to me, justifiable; but a larger portion has led to a grave misapprehension of his outlook on life and his ethical and spiritual tenets.

In his essay on "The Poetry of Barbarism," Santayana has declared that for Browning "the crude experience is the only end, the endless struggle the only ideal, and the perturbed 'Soul' the only organum of truth." Browning's temperament is such that for him "life is an adventure, not a discipline," and "the exercise of energy is the absolute good, irrespective of motives or of circumstances."[6] In similar vein, Professor Fairchild writes concerning Browning's poetry:

> At a time of deep uncertainty as to life's ultimate aim, the transference of value from the thing sought to the mere seeking provided a potent emotional lift. Since one did not know what the prize was, it was heartening to be assured that "The prize is in the process." The thing done, since it is never done, must be less important than the courage and vigor of the doing.[7]

It is undeniable that the militancy of Browning's temperament and the robustness of his optimism cause him to over-stress the value of action *per se*. The conquest of evil by discipline, self-control, and the restraints of reason is minimized. For him the crux of life is moral struggle, whose essence is not the overcoming of evil by self-denial or the avoidance of temptation but the overcoming of evil with good. Moreover, he welcomes the strenuousness of moral conflict. After paraphrasing the clause in the Lord's Prayer "Lead us not into temptation," the Pope in *The Ring and the Book* exclaims:

> Yea, but O Thou, whose servants are the bold,
> Lead such temptations by the head and hair,
> Reluctant dragons, up to who dares fight,
> That so he may do battle and have praise!
> (X, 1189–92)

"The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force"; and Browning has never more poignantly expressed his ideal of heroic moral achievement than when in utter scorn of the cowardice and procrastination of the Duke and the Lady in "The Statue and the Bust," he writes:

> Only they see not God, I know,
> Nor all that chivalry of his,
> The soldier-saints who, row on row,
>
> Burn upward each to his point of bliss—
> Since, the end of life being manifest,
> He had burned his way thro' the world to this.

One cause of a biased and warped criticism of Browning's ethical and spiritual convictions has been, I believe, a concentration on his intellectual scepticism, especially in his so-called casuistical poems, and a neglect of his unswerving faith in the sovereign virtue of love. His gnosticism in the sphere of feeling and emotion, where the intuitions and revelations of the heart are concerned, is surely as much to be reckoned with as his rational agnosticism.

In order to evaluate the ethics of Browning in "The Statue and the Bust," it is necessary to consider his general concept of the nature of evil, and its function in the moral conflict. As an absolute idealist the poet believes that God is omnipotent and all-loving; and, as a corollary to this, he has, as Professor Jones puts it, "a conviction of the ultimate nothingness of evil, and of the complete victory of the good."[8] Yet how can such a faith be reconciled with the presence and power of evil on earth? Browning's attempt to solve this age-old problem has many facets; but his main argument is that the supreme purpose of God for man is the formation of his character; and that this can be achieved only through a moral struggle, centring on a choice between good and evil. "This dread machinery of sin and sorrow" must be designed to develop "the moral qualities of man" and "to make him love in turn and be beloved."[9] In this connection, however, the poet's distrust of reason involves him in a difficulty. So far as knowledge is concerned, he maintains that every man is confined to his own subjective experience. He cannot be sure that

this has any objective validity. Even though he himself is conscious of a moral law, he has no assurance, through knowledge, that the moral law of which he is aware corresponds with a moral law in the universe without, or is in harmony with the ultimate purposes of the Absolute. Such thorough-going scepticism might make it seem a matter of indifference whether an individual follows a good or evil course. If man has no knowledge that his moral or immoral choice has any confirmation in objective reality, the only ethical value that remains lies in the qualities of energy and will evoked in the struggle. As the poet himself says, from the point of view of knowledge, "the prize is in the process." The justice of Santayana's criticism that for Browning "the exercise of energy is the absolute good, irrespective of motives or of circumstances" might seem to be confirmed.

Actually, however, this description of the tenor of Browning's poetry is far from being accurate. Lack of confirmation of its objective reality never makes the poet swerve from the conviction that man should act in accordance with the intuitions and promptings of his conscience which urge him to follow good rather than evil. These are, rationally, subjective, confined apparently to each individual's private experience, but they are an absolute for him. A man's ignorance of their ultimate worth the poet regards as part of his probation on earth. Even though he may not know until the Day of Judgment that they are in accord with divine reality, he must act in obedience to their guidance.

> Ask thy lone soul what laws are plain to thee,
> Thee, and no other; stand or fall by them!
> ("A Camel-Driver," 54–5)
>
> . . . I do
> Discern and dare decree in consequence,
> Whatever prove the peril of mistake.
> ("The Pope," 1250–2)
>
> . . . Man's part
> Is plain—to send love forth,—astray, perhaps:
> No matter, he has done his part.
> ("The Sun," 136–8)
>
> . . . I have one appeal—
> I feel, am what I feel, know what I feel;
> So much is truth to me.
> (*Sordello*, VI, 439–41)

The poet's belief that he is a moral agent, even though this may be only a pious hope, is his

> . . . solid standing-place amid
> The wash and welter, whence all doubts are bid
> Back to the ledge they break against in foam.
> ("Francis Furini," X, 161–3)

Like Kant, Browning holds that it is impossible to prove the reality of the supersensible or the existence of God through knowledge. But, again like Kant, the rational subjectivity of man's experience is for him no warrant for disregarding the intuitions of the moral consciousness. The choice of duty and goodness which it enjoins is as much a "categorical imperative" for the poet as it is for the philosopher.

Moreover, the moment Browning passes from the negations of knowledge to the sphere of intuition and feeling, his intellectual scepticism is replaced by emotional gnosticism.

> I trust in my own soul, that can perceive
> The outward and the inward, nature's good
> And God's. . . .
> (*A Soul's Tragedy*, Act I, ll. 256–8)

Above all he bases his emotional gnosticism on the sovereign virtue of love. Were knowledge all man's faculty he would be compelled to confess that "the prize is in the process." The poet, however, immediately adds, "But love is victory, the prize itself." "God! Thou art Love! I build my faith on that!" Browning wrote in *Paracelsus*, and this statement is the corner-stone of his belief and spiritual conviction. It follows that, despite the apparent contradiction between the testimonies of the heart and the head, the loving purposes of God must be working themselves out in the life of man and in the external universe.

> Is not God now i' the world His power first made?
> Is not His love at issue still with sin,
> Visibly when a wrong is done on earth?
> ("A Death in the Desert," 211–13)

There is not, from the point of view of love, any gulf between subjective and objective, between the moral ideal in the heart of man and its absolute reality in the nature of the being of God.

> Were knowledge all thy faculty, then God
> Must be ignored: love gains him by first leap.
> ("A Pillar at Sebzevar," 134–5)

Consequently, in the light of Browning's concept of love, the worth of the moral conflict cannot be confined to the mere processes of subjective

experience. Its motivation and its goal have an ethical and spiritual objective value and reality.

At this juncture, however, Browning has to grapple with the most perplexing and darkest aspect of the problem of evil. It is not difficult to comprehend that, since the development of the soul is dependent upon a moral struggle, the existence of evil is necessary in order that in combating it man's character may be shaped and God's purpose for him realized. But what can be said in the case of a sinner who makes the wrong choice and follows the path of evil? How can evil, in this connection, be reconciled with the omnipotence and infinite love of God, or be regarded as subject to his power?

In dealing with this problem, Browning does not qualify the optimism of his absolute idealism. If God has absolute authority over evil as well as good, and if his purposes of infinite love cannot be thwarted by evil, then evil through being transmuted must be instrumental in the working out of his divine plan. There is no sin so vile, no evil so grim, as to be incapable of *ultimate* transmutation. As he writes:

> Of absolute and irretrievable
> And all-subduing black,—black's soul of black
> Beyond white's power to disintensify,—
> Of this I saw no sample. . . .
> ("A Bean-Stripe," 200–3)

For Browning, "all things ill" are not, as Milton regarded them, merely "slavish officers of vengeance" in the service of "the Supreme Good"; they are rather, through being finally transmuted, the slavish officers of God's love. Ultimately, since God is omnipotent as well as all-loving, every sinner, through remorse, repentance, atonement, and divine mercy, must be redeemed. Such a belief involves the rejection of the doctrine of eternal punishment. Confronted with an appalling aftermath of evil in the bodies of three suicides lying in the Paris morgue, Browning writes in "Apparent Failure":

> My own hope is, a sun will pierce
> The thickest cloud earth ever stretched;
> That, after Last, returns the First,
> Though a wide compass round be fetched;
> That what began best, can't end worst,
> Nor what God blessed once, prove accurst.

It is in connection with Browning's belief in evil as "stuff for transmuting" that his ethical standards in "The Statue and the Bust" must be

evaluated. Whenever good and evil grapple there is no hesitation whatever in his praise of the choice of virtue and his condemnation of the choice of vice. This indeed is the very core of his moral credo. No other poet has been a more militant champion of virtue. In *The Ring and the Book* there is no measure in the contrast between his extolling of the good as represented in Pompilia and Caponsacchi and his denunciation of evil as represented in Guido. Yet, because he does regard evil as "stuff for transmuting," he holds that the shirking of the moral conflict is the worst sin of all.

If the will is alive, if a man acts with energy and courage even in pursuit of an evil end, there is hope for him. The poet believes that the punishment which sin entails, the prickings of conscience, the realization on the part of the sinner that he is hopelessly contending against the will of God and is betraying his better nature, must, in conjunction with divine love and mercy, ultimately redeem him either on earth or in a life hereafter. But if a man's will is dead, if through inertness or cowardice he refuses to act at all, his passivity is a graver sin than that of an active evil-doer. Since he has shunned the moral conflict, no development of his soul is possible, not even through the transmuting of evil-doing.

> Let a man contend to the uttermost
> For his life's set prize, be what it will!

To play a part in the moral struggle with will and decision is for Browning the primary requirement of all. In *Christmas-Eve and Easter-Day* he rejoices that he can

> Be crossed and tempted as a man,
> Not left in God's contempt apart,
> With ghastly smooth life, dead at heart,
> Tame in earth's paddock as her prize.
> (*Easter-Day*, XXXIII, 16–19)

In *The Ring and the Book*, the Pope denounces Pietro and Violante for their timidity and double-dealing in vacillating between right and wrong:

> . . . Go,
> Never again elude the choice of tints,
> White shall not neutralize the black, nor good
> Compensate ill in man, absolve him so:
> Life's business being just the terrible choice.
> ("The Pope," 1234–8)

Browning's contempt for faint-heartedness and paralysis of will is, as Pigou notes, reminiscent of Dante's scorn for him "who made through cowardice the great refusal," and pines forever in the outskirts of the Inferno, "hateful to God and to his enemies."[10]

As has been stated, Browning believes that even a sinful course of action is ultimately transmuted to become an instrument for the realization of the good ends of a God of infinite power and love. In "By the Fireside" he maintains that hate as well as love may have a function in the development of individual souls, and consequently in the evolution of the human race:

> Be hate that fruit or love that fruit,
> It forwards the general deed of man,
> And each of the Many helps to recruit
> The life of the race by a general plan;
> Each living his own to boot.

It must be acknowledged that the poet's argument here, and in kindred passages, skates perilously close to the verge of the pernicious casuistry of "Let us do evil that good may come." As a matter of fact it is twisted into such sophistry by Don Juan, Sludge the Medium, and other protagonists of Browning's casuistical poems. It must also be conceded that the poet's intellectual agnosticism beclouds, at times, his speculative thought on moral and spiritual problems. Yet the whole tenor and purport of his poetry, when he is voicing his own convictions, refute the assertion that for him "the exercise of energy is the absolute good, irrespective of motives or of circumstances." To maintain that evil by being transmuted is ultimately overruled by God for good, is very different from an acceptance of the casuistical precept "Let us do evil that good may come." In this respect Browning's belief may be compared with the Christian doctrine of the Atonement. Faith in the potency of the Atonement is in harmony with his conviction that evil is "stuff for transmuting," that no sinner is beyond the pale of final redemption; but it does not imply that evil *per se* is ever good, or that the following of it is ever justified. Browning would have echoed St. Paul's impassioned protest, "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid."

There is no other concept in Browning's ethics which has been more adversely criticized than his belief that evil is illusory. Yet there is an important element of truth in his contention. If evil and good are not coequal, evil cannot have the same degree of reality as good. Evil is rebellion, negation, imperfection, the consciousness of the gulf between

man's moral ideal and his present state of being. Having served its end in the moral conflict it will be overthrown, since the purpose of a loving God for his universe must be the final and complete victory of goodness. The conviction that evil is relative rather than absolute has been nobly voiced by Milton:

> Yea, even that which Mischief meant most harm
> Shall in the happy trial prove most glory.
> But evil on itself shall back recoil,
> And mix no more with goodness, when at last
> Gathered like scum, and settled to itself,
> It shall be in eternal restless change,
> Self-fed and self-consumed. If this fail
> The pillared firmament is rottenness,
> And earth's base built on stubble. . . .
> (*Comus*, 591–9)

Milton's concept of the relativity of evil does not, however, imply that he regards it as *mere* semblance or illusion.

Unfortunately, Browning's representation of this aspect of evil is warped by his intellectual agnosticism. An extreme instance is his argument that although evil is an illusion, it is necessary for man to regard it as real in order to preserve the worth of the moral struggle. This would seem to make man's moral effort dependent on ignorance and delusion, or to hold, as Professor Jones writes, that "The world is a kind of moral gymnasium, crowded with phantoms, wherein by exercise man makes moral muscle."[11] As I have stated, the confusion of thought engendered by Browning's sceptical theory of knowledge seems to me responsible for much misunderstanding regarding his ethical standards. The poet exposes himself to this because he fails to realize that even from an absolute point of view evil has a relative degree of reality, and is not mere semblance and illusion.

There is also, I feel, on another ground, a residuum of truth in the hostile criticism of the poet's concept of evil. Often as Browning is preoccupied with the problem of evil, he never, even while condemning it, feels that loathing and horror of evil which characterizes the prophets of the Old Testament. He does not, as *The Ring and the Book* is ample testimony, shut his eyes to it as Emerson did. One would hesitate to say of him, as it has been said of Milton contrasted with Dante, that in his representation of Hell "he never saw the damned." Yet the gulf between Dante's utter abhorrence of evil and Browning's reaction to it is wide.

The explanation lies in Browning's temperamental and emotional

optimism. Its sources are both physical and psychical. A statement of Carlyle concerning the poet may be cited:

> But there's a great contrast between him and me. He seems very content with life, and takes much satisfaction in the world.
> It's a very strange and curious spectacle to behold a man in these days so confidently cheerful.[12]

As William James has written:

> In many persons, happiness is congenital and irreclaimable. "Cosmic emotion" inevitably takes in them the form of enthusiasm and freedom. . . . We find such persons in every age, passionately flinging themselves upon their sense of the goodness of life. . . .[13]

Such people are "animally happy," and spiritually their religion is that of "healthy-mindedness." They know little of the divisions of "the sick soul," or the agonizing struggle of those who through conversion must be "twice born" to achieve their ultimate salvation.

Intellectually there is pessimism in Browning's attitude towards the world as it is. In "Reverie" and elsewhere he laments,

> Earth's good is with evil blent:
> Good struggles but evil reigns.

Yet, the poet's emotional optimism is far more potent than his intellectual pessimism. Psychologically this optimism is reflected in the buoyancy and positiveness of his temperament, morally and spiritually in his conviction that, since God is a being of infinite love, the whole scheme and framework of his creation must be flawlessly good from an absolute point of view, in which the transient and illusory appearances of evil and discord are resolved and transmuted into the eternal harmonies of God's all-loving purposes. While it is somewhat arbitrary to wrench the lines in Pippa's song from their dramatic context, ("God's in his heaven— / All's right with the world!") there can be no doubt that they voice the poet's belief. So also do the lines in "At the 'Mermaid,'" although dramatically attributed to Shakespeare:

> I find earth not gray but rosy.
> Heaven not grim but fair of hue.
> Do I stoop? I pluck a posy.
> Do I stand and stare? All's blue.

Browning's representation of evil is conditioned by his optimism and the militancy of his temperament and conflict-loving nature. Evil is not

in his eyes primarily horrible and loathsome, but rather "stuff for transmuting." Like Roderick Dhu in Scott's *The Lady of the Lake* he confronts it with eagerness, "and that stern joy which warriors feel in foemen worthy of their steel." As "stuff for transmuting" he must even show that "there is a soul of goodness in things evil." There is nothing in the world which

> But touched aright, prompt yields each particle its tongue
> Of elemental flame,—no matter whence flame sprung
> From gums and spice, or else from straw and rottenness,
> So long as soul has power to make them burn. . . .
> (*Fifine at the Fair*, LV, 12–15)

It cannot be denied that such tenets do tend to stress the worth of the moral struggle *per se* rather than the black-and-white opposition of its elements, sin as Dante saw it in its loathsomeness and virtue in its crystalline purity.

Yet this distinction is only relatively valid, and often more theoretical than actual. As I have pointed out, no speculative doubts regarding the confirmation in objective reality of his subjective experiences prevent Browning from deeming it imperative that he should be loyal to the guidance of his conscience. For him the choice between good and evil is an all-important decision. He takes his stand for virtue along with "the famous ones of old" who, in the "Epilogue" to *Ferishtah's Fancies*, his imagination pictures "thronging through the cloud-rift" as witnesses of his own moral conflict. They are an evidence to him that his choice of good rather than evil, so far from being a matter of indifference, has supreme value and significance.

> "Was it for mere fool's play, make-believe and mumming,
> So we battled it like men, not boylike sulked or whined?
> Each of us heard clang God's 'Come!' and each was coming:
> Soldiers all, to forward-face, not sneaks to lag behind!"

Despite the approach to casuistry and the confusion of thought in which Browning is frequently befogged through his nescient theory of knowledge and distrust of reason, there is no real ground for the assertion that he is indifferent to ethical ends, or that for him "the exercise of energy is the absolute good, irrespective of motives or of circumstances." His belief that, if God is ompnipotent and all-loving, evil must finally be transmuted, by no means implies that he is blind to the moral distinction between good and evil, or in any way counsels "Let us do evil that good may come."

Above all, when Browning turns from the evidence of the head to that of the heart in what has been called "the richest vein of pure ore" in his poetry, his view of the nature and function of love, he attains a certainty of good which convinces him of its objective as well as subjective validity. "But love is victory, the prize itself." Who can doubt that in the noble utterance of the Pope in *The Ring and the Book* the poet is attesting his own assurance:

> . . . I
> Put no such dreadful question to myself,
> Within whose circle of experience burns
> The central truth, Power, Wisdom, Goodness,—God:
> I must outlive a thing ere know it dead. . . .
>
> So, never I miss footing in the maze,
> No,—I have light nor fear the dark at all.
> (X, 1631–5, 1659–60)

NOTES

1 Edmund Gosse, *Life of Algernon Charles Swinburne* (New York, 1917), 39–40.
2 W. H. Griffin and H. C. Minchin, *The Life of Robert Browning* (3rd ed.; London, 1938), 258.
3 Edward Berdoe, *The Browning Cyclopaedia* (6th ed.; London, 1909), 519.
4 Henry Jones, *Browning as a Philosophical and Religious Teacher* (Glasgow, 1892), 111.
5 Cited in *ibid.*, 118.
6 George Santayana, *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* (New York, 1924), 212, 206.
7 Hoxie Neale Fairchild, *Religious Trends in English Poetry*, IV (New York, 1957), 154.
8 Jones, *Browning*, 119.
9 *The Ring and the Book*, X, 1375–81.
10 See A. C. Pigou, *Robert Browning as a Religious Teacher* (London, 1901), 111.
11 Jones, *Browning*, 240.
12 Quoted by Henry Jones, *Browning as a Philosophical and Religious Teacher* (Glasgow, 1902), 45.
13 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York, 1920), 79.

THE GERMANS LOOK AT THE ATOMIC AGE

H. Boeschenstein

Friedrich Nietzsche seems to have been the first German philosopher to acquire and use a typewriter. Antediluvian though his Danish model must have been in comparison with modern perfection, he was enthusiastic. As he was plagued with a steadily deteriorating eyesight the machine was just what he needed, and on occasion it also stood him in good stead when he wanted to wind up a letter. "Good-bye for now," he wrote to Paul Rée in 1881, "the typewriter refuses to work. I have just come to the spot where the ribbon is patched together." Remembering his panegyric on the electric streetcars of Turin one is tempted to state that Nietzsche was, for a long time to come, the last German philosopher to have a good word to say on technical innovations.

Suspicion of and outright hostility to technology came naturally to German intellectuals of the last century. The Romantic tradition acted as a brake on realistic thinking, which not even Marx, with all his awareness of an industrialized society, was strong enough to release. This lack of understanding for the material exigencies of life and this failure to discuss and interpret technical and social changes have often been pointed out as the causes or rather the symptoms of a growing estrangement, in Germany, between thought and life. The industrial revolution went on; German writers, artists, and philosophers, the majority of them, confessed bewilderment or disgust. Adolf von Menzel (1815–1905), who in the subjects he painted encompassed the old as well as the new—a musical soirée at the Court of Sanssouci, an iron foundry, or a railway yard—has no counterpart among the writers of his generation. These were unable or unwilling to expand their imagination, or their vocabulary, to include the conquests made by science and industry. While people everywhere flocked to the railway stations and were eager to board the flimsy coaches, their contemporaries in German fiction were still made to travel to the sound of the postboy's horn. True

enough, when in 1845 the Suebian poet Justinus Kerner, in a poem called "Beneath the Sky," bewailed the coming of the mechanical age and the going of a romantic period, and anticipated the horrible prospect of a blue sky darkened by a train of flying box cars, Gottfried Keller parried with a better poem and a better attitude, boisterously greeting the arrival of the Elias chariot—this being the metaphor for railway trains—and wishing he could be a passenger in an airship carrying wine from Greece to his native Switzerland. "Who would not want to be its pilot?" He for one would, if only to sample the cargo, bend over the gondola, and pour his cup into the lonely sea beneath. But the Romantic overtones are obvious in this ceremonial sacrifice: Keller would have thought twice before wasting good wine and thrice before entrusting himself to an airship. In his own practice as a novelist he hardly ever reduced the fiery dragon—another metaphor for trains used in his reply to Kerner—to its proper technical term so that his imaginative characters might be induced to take a train. They travel on foot or by coach. Older writers continued almost to the end of the century to speak of locomotives as smoking dragons and to refer to telephone wires as Aeolian harps. The shock imparted by the naturalistic writers after 1880 was in no small degree due to the fact that they forced their readers into the company of bedraggled section-men and sweating, cursing, threshing-machine attendants.

This is not the place to recapitulate the slow familiarization of German poets with ship-building yards, factories, bicycles, and other products of industry, the less so since such familiarity soon began to breed or renew contempt. Once again, around the turn of the century, the poets found it fashionable to look askance at the realities of a technically determined development and—a matter of far greater concern—to disengage themselves from its social and political implications. Stefan George's call to aloofness and Rilke's one-way ticket into the "inner space of the world," the soul, mark two of the more conspicuous forms of retreat; the psychological novel with its preference for analysis provided another. This desertion of reality became, after World War II, a panicky flight. The paths and bypaths of contemporary German fiction abound with prophets promising a millennium to come, on condition that we sever all ties with technology and industry. If some of them whistle in the dark and keep on repeating that the technical age is all but over, all but dead from its own suicidal *hubris*, others muster enough courage to join in the kill. Max Frisch, whose reputation is high, at home and abroad, has just published a novel in which an engineer is hounded

to death by a modern version of the Erinyes, on an indictment of respectable age—ever since the days of Vulcan and Prometheus the gods have disliked and punished inquisitive, artful makers of tools.

German philosophers—the term being used in its wider connotation which includes all those writing on cultural and socio-ethical problems —were if anything even more myopic towards the rise of industry and technology than the poets. They have, in fact, initiated and initialled with their undisputed authority the wide rift in Germany between the humanities and the technical sciences. Theodor Litt, the grand old man of present-day philosophy of education, one of the few thinkers who can envisage the bridging of that rift, puts the blame squarely on the shoulders of Herder, Wilhelm von Humboldt, Schiller, and other luminaries of the classical period. He reproaches them with having relegated all interest in practical affairs and technical work to a lower order, to a realm which neither absorbs nor radiates the soul-lifting powers of the humanities. They shared the abhorrence in which artisans were held in ancient Greece and underscored it by constant reference to the dehumanizing effect of manual occupations. In doing so they have driven a wedge between —as they saw it—educated and uneducated Germans. Workshops, laboratories, and factories were to them something that "ought not to be"; training in science and technology remained outside the hallowed sphere of truly creative and formative efforts. Such antagonism, of course, did not prevent an ever increasing vitality in scientific and technical workers, even if they were given the cold shoulder and left without the benefit of the humanities. Representatives of the latter arrogated to themselves the title of an élite and the rôle of the only guardian of cultural values; and German regard for the philosophical word and those who supplied it being what it was, the toilers in the workshops and laboratories accepted the verdict and looked upon themselves as inferior in all matters of spiritual leadership. The trust placed on the humanists was, however, ill placed, in the hands of intellectuals who had little understanding of and no sympathy for the significance of nineteenth-century industrial and social aspirations.

One of the reasons—not fully realized at the time—why Germans were so completely taken in by the title of Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West* and its forecast of an irreversible march to Doomsday stemmed from the fact that the end of Western culture was made to coincide with an unconditional surrender to technical civilization. This was, of course, not to be regarded as a mere synchronism; the exclusive devotion to practical science provided both the cause and the most striking

illustration of cultural disintegration. The warnings of generations of humanists—so it would appear—were now close to fulfilment. Had they been heeded, who was to say that the course of history and Spengler's conception of it might not have taken a quite different turn? If German intellectuals, by and large, accepted Spengler's prophecy, they did so with the gleeful rejoinder "We told you so!" Spengler's advice to the youth of his day to drop pen or brush and become instead conversant with the slide-rule had the ring of irony and fatalism; it contained no hope of a revitalized will to live—all it meant was that it is better to climb on the bandwagon and ride into the cataclysm, instead of being crushed by its wheels.

Spengler's prognosis was made in 1918. The last twenty years have seen a marked decline in the belief that cultures are plant-like forms, subject to the rhythm of natural growth and decay. Yet the penchant to assume the worst of technical expansion persisted. While few Germans will any longer subscribe to Spengler's view of the seasonal appearance and disappearance of cultural patterns, most of them have taken over and amplified his low evaluation of technical civilization. The fear of dehumanization through contact with technical thought and practice has assumed fantastic proportions. What is more, while Spengler was hopeful that new actors were waiting in the wings, to take over from a decrepit cast, we are now told that the downward pull of the technical age will involve and ruin us all, with no survivors left.

That a host of intellectuals should write in the same vein and for the same purpose of warning of the dangerous commitment to technology is no coincidence. The Germans, still held in the thrall of their so-called economic miracle and successful reconstruction, have not yet found the formula to slow down the extraversion of their energies. It is obvious that they have misgivings about the continued trend towards a new *bourgeois*, materialistic society, and at the same time find it difficult to resist its amenities. The blame for this moral insufficiency is often put on the stultifying influence of mechanization in all its aspects. It is well to remember, in this connection, that the acquisition of technical appliances spread after World War II with a suddenness that made Germans very susceptible to possible harmful effects. The foot-weary soldiers, refugees, and expellees of 1945 fell an easy prey to the more juvenile aspects of the magic exercised by motor cars, radios, and television sets.

They have suffered accordingly, if we are to believe the prophets of gloom, or, in this particular case, the psychologists. For a number of

such cultural diagnoses come from psychologists, rather than from philosophers. The shift reflects the central position which psychology and sociology occupy today. Whatever the changes which the world will be undergoing, they are first discovered at their place of origin, the human personality. An observant reader, once he has become acquainted with the nefarious influence of mechanization on one or several individuals, is then supposed to draw his own conclusions as to how all others will be affected. In 1956 Joachim Bodamer caused quite a stir with his book *Der Mann von heute*. The German word *Mann* is the equivalent of only one of the two meanings contained in the English *man*, the masculine meaning. However, much as Bodamer tries to stay with his limited subject, it is clear that the implications of his findings apply to the distaff side as well. Take his attempt to make the telephone the scapegoat for the deterioration of one of the constituent elements of true humanity, the faculty to converse (men are, in Musil's words, the only species that depends for its propagation on the medium of conversation). The ease with which we can reach for and talk into the membrane, without knowing what we are going to talk about, is, in Bodamer's opinion, largely responsible for the shrinking of language to stereotype expressions and for an almost habitual aggressiveness. A listener, often forced into a conversation against his will, is at once predisposed to retaliate in kind; even well-intended modulations of voice and feeling become lost in the mechanical process, and a crackling that is inherent in this means of communication makes a travesty of all tender words, particularly of those that used to make discourse among lovers a profoundly moving experience. Now if all this has, as Bodamer assumes, diminished the emotional and amorous capacity of the German male, women at the other end of the line have certainly suffered no less. The same is true of the havoc wrought on men by the use of motor cars, another result of mechanization by which Bodamer affects to be deeply perturbed. Women are no more resistant than men to the tempting feeling of power, and equally inclined to add the price of their car to their self-esteem. The tickling sensation of superiority when passing another vehicle seems to be common to most drivers.

If the men and women sitting behind the wheel undergo an almost visible reduction to primitive behaviour, the passengers fare no better. Confined to the same compartment that is hurled forward by roaring pistons, they will try to assist in the driving, by keeping silent or staring for possible obstacles and warnings of dangers. The car throttles all ease and freedom of thought or expression; it will, like the telephone, in the

long run—often shortened by an insane eagerness to pile up milage and boast about speed—choke the finer channels of human communication.

Bodamer's warnings made interesting reading, but no apparent impact on those concerned. The drivers, phone addicts, radio listeners, and television viewers went about their business as usual or soon recovered and regained the ability to talk back. The danger was declared to belong to the infant days of mechanization and motorization. A parallel to the mass media of our time was found in the early printing press, and it was said that the same gloomy forecast might have been made in the sixteenth century, and the end of all serious literature have been predicted.

The exuberance was soon to be dampened by a much more incisive prognosticator: Günther Anders, whose book *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen* ("The Obsolescence of Man"; 1956) continues to spark lively discussions. A razor-sharp thinker, a pupil of Husserl, and the son of the well-known psychologist William Stern, Anders followed the problem presented by man in a mechanized society far beyond its psychological implications.

II

For Anders the crippling effect of radio, phone, and television on our habits of speech, real and deplorable as it is, will be dwarfed by a much greater peril, by the loss of a sound relationship with reality, with the world and its place in the mystery of creation. What we are shown on the screen is, in Anders' opinion, nothing but a series of phantoms which have no correspondence in the outside world, unless it be that of the producer-advertiser or the consumer of such phantoms. The world around us, once an inexhaustible object of wonderment, an incentive to our exploratory faculties, has been discovered to form excellent material for entertainment which millions of customers can be induced to buy at a stiff price. The producers, now that they know what people wish to have dished up to their eyes and ears, in room-service style, regard nothing as sacred or beyond the ken of their inane interpretation. Immense stores for thought and action are being dissipated, pilfered, and minced up into "entertainment values." The worst deformation, as Anders sees it, stems from the desire to insert into everything projected onto the screen a note of insipid chumminess; spectators and listeners are made to feel that they are on an equal footing with the celebrities of the day: past and present, man and beast, as they

come from the hands of the embalmers or beauticians and appear on the screen, all look harmless, easily comprehensible, posing no problems and requiring no effort of understanding. This accounts for the widely noticeable alienation from reality and for our inability to recognize let alone deal with its fascinating, threatening, and challenging complexities. Invited to see the "President of the Nation" making history, what do we see? A president groomed to perform for a multitude of onlookers and instructed to reduce the dimensions of history to something enjoyable and salable. What this will do to the president needs no comment. But what of those millions whose eyes are glued to the screen and who flatter themselves that they know what goes on in the world? It is often claimed that they are being welded into an amorphous mass. Anders thinks differently. Instead of becoming mass particles they turn, each for himself, into hermits. Mass opinion can be intelligent as it certainly is powerful, but that of a hermit who craves for nothing better than crooners and glamour girls, and demands of reality chiefly its histrionic antics, cannot. Present-day society is made up of countless such hermits, pseudo-hermits, since the respectable hermit of old used to make every effort to renounce the humdrum of life and probe existence at its deeper levels. But has not television helped to restore the family to its rightful function as the basic unit of social life? Far from it, according to Anders; television degrades the house to a container in which a screen can be set up. Switch on your channel, and the picture serves as an escape-hatch through which to leave the room and the company and flutter around in unreality. "The family has been reconverted into a miniature audience, the living room into a miniature theatre and the movie house into a model home." Lest someone should still feel inclined to retort that the educational gain of certain programmes on occasion outweighs the loss in intelligent perspective, Anders warns that, in front of the screen, our relationship with the outside world is of necessity unilateral, while all stimulating contacts ought to be bilateral and put us in a position to meet reality without an intermediary, at any rate without the intermediary of an advertiser and his helpmates.

Anyone less obsessed than Anders and many of his countrymen with the fear of modern forms of standardized entertainment might answer that it is only the weaker fry that will be harrowed out of substantial existence by technical devices, while stronger characters can blow away the froth. Have not many scientists and inventors proved to be impervious to the evil of mechanization and retained their serene humanity? Denis de Rougemont has made himself their advocate; he points out

that the most successful minds, now as before, go about their work in a playful mood and construct computers just as others play with tinker toys, returning unscathed from their laboratories to their true interests in music, literature, or chess. A Gallic sense of proportion and *savoir vivre* may put things in this light, but not German aversion for compromise and ease. Germans find it difficult to conceive of a man who remains unaffected by his association with the devil in a mechanic's overalls, and many of them have analysed the effects of specialized technical thinking on the human mind. Invariably it is contended that a resulting hardening of imaginative and creative arteries will lead to the neglect and ultimately to the atrophy of artistic, philosophical, and mystic creativeness. Technical categories become "wired in" properties, to use an expression of Fred Hoyle, and the tendency to treat all problems, social, psychological, and transcendental, as reducible to technical tasks and mathematical formulas is all but instinctive.

Once more Günther Anders stands out for the penetrating inquest he has made into the changes in our consciousness. The fact that he believes the worst is yet to come and that his diagnosis pretends to outline the future rather than describe the present does not invalidate his findings. They are, by implication, a summary of often heard accusations against the age of automation, cybernetics, and atomic bombs. Anders has pushed these accusations to their bitter end; characteristically enough he speaks of them in the present tense, as if to insinuate that the dismal future they entail has already arrived.

The term Anders uses to pin-point the consummate effect of mechanization is "Promethean *pudor*." Prometheus, long the symbol for Western man of his radiant self-reliance and eagerness to help mankind to a better life, has, in Anders' view, become an embarrassing reminder of human hopes frustrated and confidence deflated. We are ashamed of ourselves for not being really Promethean and dare no longer identify ourselves with this archetype. For it has now become evident that there are limits to our abilities, and the irony of it all is that these limits have been thrown into sharp relief by the products of our own technical skill. It is the manufactured goods, superior as they are in endurance, reliability, exactness, and their capability of being easily made and quickly replaced, that make us feel ashamed of our biological origin. "Here I sit," Goethe's Prometheus defiantly shouts to the Gods, "I make men in my image, a race to be like me, to suffer, to weep and to rejoice, and to ignore you, as I do!" Promethean man today has lost all such pride. "Who am I?" he asks himself, and answers, "A being outdistanced by

his own tools and forced by them to the painful awareness of biological insufficiency. The gadgets I have made are better than I, technically speaking, and comparison on technical grounds is the only valid measuring-rod, since the machine is now the measure of all things." A bewildered man has come to admit that manufactured things have it all over things created, animals or humans. It is a handicap to be born and a trade mark of distinction to be manufactured. Our instruments are perfect and could do all that is expected of them, if only they did not have to be serviced by men, that is to say by attendants branded with the stigma of being born instead of made. Man "has become the weakest link in the chain of his own creations, unable to suffer the heights and depths and speeds and temperatures which they can suffer," as comments the reviewer of the English translation of another German cultural analysis (Heinz Gartmann's *Stärker als die Technik*, 1955; *Man Unlimited*, 1957).

This is not the time-worn complaint about man having become the servant of his machines instead of being their master. It is the opposite, a realization that we cannot service our inventions properly. Our rockets might take us to the moon any day now, were it not for our mental and physical constitution, which is unable to do its part. What had happened to the horse at the beginning of the century is now happening to man, he is revealed in his inferiority to technical products. The difference is that no one expected the horse to drive an automobile, whereas man is still needed to guide modern technical appliances. How can he do that, deficient as he is by virtue of his biological origin? Since there is no likelihood that human beings will ever drop from the conveyor-belt and come into the world as precision instruments, their only salvation lies in transforming themselves, as much as possible, into something like a manufactured product.

Indications that this is being attempted are many. The trend to obliterate man's ignominious biological heritage and all it entails—different creatures in each case, with never two specimens completely alike and conforming to the exemplary standards of serial production—is fairly general, according to Anders, though it may assume forms that are hardly discernible to the untrained eye. Take the use of cosmetics. These are not, as we naïvely assumed, put on to make the wearer appear more attractive, but to make him or her look like everybody else. A hidden urge to cover up our individuality, come closer to a standard type of man, and approximate the ideal of mechanical mass-production, is father to the cosmetic effort. Again, in

a most ingenious digression on music Anders tries to show that there is the closest correspondence between jazz, its combustion of sound and fury, its stops and starts, and the behaviour of a machine.

These are, however, only straws in the wind, amusing symptoms of man's desire to become less and less distinguishable from manufactured products. What is of greater consequence for the future of mankind is the employment, now openly propagated, of scientific means to transform men into something more mechanical and less biological, so that they may redeem themselves in the face of their machines and recover some of their former confidence. This is what "human engineering" is supposed to achieve. It is the greatest crime against the soul of man, if you look at it from any other level than that of technological progress, a logical step to take, if you accept the machine age. For if you do, men must be reassembled in order to measure up to the machine. The human body, this embarrassing biological fossil of an age when tools were still very simple, is expected to respond to "human engineering"; properly dehumanized man may yet be of some service and cease to be a disgrace among the much more perfect technical installations.

Lack of precision and durability are not our only shortcomings. It is, for instance, imperative for a well-run plant that replacements be on hand for any part that stops functioning. Spare parts are always of some specific kind, and all alike within their category. Since human beings, by virtue of their fast developing symbiosis with machines, have become cogs in the wheel of technical civilization, they must also strive to stand by as spare parts. Hence the egalitarian bias of our time, supported by education, mores, and manners. Men must be made to feel, if they do not already, that they may be called up as replacements, any time, at some particular spot. The suppression of all individuality—angularity in Toronto—is a prerequisite to the spare-part character of men, and anyone who refuses to be like the others is promptly labelled a fool or shot as a saboteur.

Man at work is a grim picture to behold, but not worse than man in his leisure hours. Dropping all pretence of forecasting the future Anders lifts his drastic illustrations from the scene around us. What does he discover? Endless caravans of tourists, in and out of season, seemingly a living refutation of his claim that people no longer go out into the world but have it brought to their screens. The appearance of a vital interest in and personal apprehension of reality is however deceiving. The travel agency that assures its clientele "You will feel at home wherever you go" is well aware of the trend. Abroad or in one's own

house, feeling at home means chasing phantoms, nibbling away at a processed reality. People travel not in order to face their enigmatic, mysterious surroundings, not to gather experience and mature it into wisdom, but to bring home pictures. The clicking of shutters in front of all the sights bears witness to this lusty killing of reality with snapshots. Italian basilicas and French cathedrals are scanned for their photographic effects, the eye anticipates the coloured slide, and the mind turns homeward and sets up the projector with which the harvest of phantoms will be showered on neighbours and friends. Nor is the holidayer who segregrates himself from the trek and digs in at the seashore any better. He is not, as one might judge from the distance, renewing the art of contemplation. On closer inspection he will be found to be a "much occupied loafer" reading an illustrated magazine, chewing gum, listening to a portable radio, and missing his television set. In his capacity for pluralistic though passive receptiveness he registers many signals and sensations without reacting to any, at least not in vigorous, creative fashion. Leisure time, a reservoir of energy available for intellectual and spiritual adventures, is today frittered away, for lack of faith, purpose, and curiosity.

Forbidden on every seventh day to operate his machines man has become a Sunday neurotic, a fish out of water. The hobby shops take cognizance of the situation and carry a large stock of "artificial obstacles," easy hurdles, as it were, that can be placed between man and his desire for the finished mechanical product, and fill even his leisure time with the joy of overcoming technical difficulties. Assembling a few bolts, boards, and tubes into a radio set is thus credited with giving scope to creative instincts. Max Picard, one of the most thoughtful observers of what he calls the crisis of present-day civilization, attributes the fondness for effortless activities, after working hours, to the externalization and atomization of man. On a superficial level, we are able to do too many things, though nothing out of the centre of our being. There is neither continuity of thought and feeling nor concentration of interests to serve some great purpose—expanding technical commodities for the sake of more comfort is no substitute for an inspiring devotion. Man wants to be everything and identify himself with anything mechanical, his car, aeroplane, or his television set. Priceless resources of intellectual, artistic, and religious faculties lie dormant and are in danger of going stale for want of application. Atomized man presents, in Picard's opinion, as much of a threat to mankind as the atomic bomb.

The bomb! Whether openly admitted, tacitly assumed, or cautiously alluded to, the bomb is uppermost in the minds of those who demur to the preponderance of technical thought and practice. The bomb acts as a watershed, dividing those who still believe that it can be placed under control from those who entertain no such hope. As one would expect, Anders is among the latter, and easily their best spokesman. Again the cogency of his argument is both brilliant and merciless. To listen to him, it is no longer a question of whether or not the bomb will push us over the brink, since it has already done so. It is only befuddled thinking that still goes on wondering how and when this means of military power will be put in moth balls. For the atomic bomb does not, according to Anders, fall within the category of means, as traditional weapons do. It is not something we can put to a specific use: its effects will go far beyond any purposeful objective, military or otherwise. The destructive power of the bomb is absolute and leaves no advantageous situation that can be followed up and turned into success of some kind, into something intended and aimed at. The only aim it can fulfil is that of complete destruction. It is for similar reasons palpably misleading to speak of nuclear-bomb experiments. Experiments are controlled and take place within a limited sphere, a sphere that is isolated from everyday reality and can, if the need should arise, be marked off as a danger zone. Nuclear explosions follow no such rules. Their character is that of a *force majeure*, or, if you prefer, of natural catastrophes, very much in the manner of plagues or earthquakes. We can release the destructive force of the bomb, but we are in no position to contain its effects. Thus nothing less than a new dimension has been added to man's possibilities as a history-making being. Until recently, his actions were either of a private nature not affecting history, however significant they might otherwise be, or of public character, determining or even producing historic events. Transhistoric interreference was conceivable in the form of the aforementioned natural catastrophes only. With the atomic bomb man can write his own *finis* to all future human history. The classical premiss which knew that "all men are mortal" must now run, "All mankind is exposed to total annihilation."

What is one to do in order that man will take his hands off a weapon that serves no useable purpose? Anders has no answer, unless it be his hope that we shall become frightened out of our insanity by the spectre of final destruction. Inveterate pessimist that he is, he sees no prospect for that, as long as our emotions remain unaroused by the magnitude of our predicament. He has nothing but scorn for the fashion-

able literary proclamations that ours is the "age of anguish and anxiety," suspecting as he does that the purveyors of these sentiments are at best motivated by fear of their own death and hardly ever moved by the imminent threat to all living beings.

III

The harbingers of bad tidings do not have it all their own way. The last few years have seen a remarkable resurgence of an optimism which holds that the Third Machine Age has not had a fair trial. Jurors with less stern dispositions have re-examined the evidence and come to more hopeful conclusions. Christian thinkers especially have their own ideas about the atomically guided apocalypse; they will not suffer our civilization to go into the general receivership of the devil. Genesis 1:28 has in numerous instances supplied a convenient starting line: "And God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea. . . ." This is taken to be God's exhortation to man to develop tools and devise techniques for the conquest of his environment. There can be nothing inherently wicked in technology: it may have gone to extremes and the balance become lopsided, but man should be able to redress the balance. If the letter of such Old Testament pronouncements is a dubious basis to build on, the spirit of the New Testament on the other hand instils unassailable confidence. Christ will not leave us to our own perilous course, the apostolic powers he disseminated continue to leaven mankind and instruct our minds, to the end of time. It is easy to see what the application of such faith to present-day problems will do: the Anglican Church official who the other day made bold to suggest that God might well have come to regard mankind as expendable and unworthy of being rescued from its suicidal tracks gave voice to a minority Christian opinion. By and large Christian writers today advance some of the best arguments to countermand the automatic explosion of the atomic bomb which Anders predicts, as they also spread a most effective antidote to total and global despair.

In 1952 Klemens Brockmöller, a Jesuit priest, published his *Christentum am Morgen des Atomzeitalters*, a book which has done much to combat cultural fatalism, at any rate in Christian circles. Brockmöller's thesis rests on two convictions. First, our era is not un-Christian simply because it rejects current forms of Christianity. Responsibility for a weakening religious interest lies also with the Church, which has shown

great lack in adaptive zest. In the past, Christianity has shown itself capable of gaining a controlling influence in succeeding cultural periods, first in Judeo-Hellenic antiquity, later in mediaeval Aristotelianism, and more recently in the *bourgeois* societies of Europe. Similar amalgamations have been effected with non-Western cultural areas. The history of Christianity is not one of an *ecclesia militans* riding to final victory, but rather a Church feeling out the needs of each historical phase and ministering to them, out of its inexhaustible variety of spiritual resources. There is no reason why some vital religious assistance should not be extended to contemporary civilization. The practical proposals Brockmöller makes to bring religion in line with the realities of our days have attracted wide attention. Secondly, if a new *rapprochement* between secular and spiritual forces should fail, there is still no cause for alarm. The technical age will then pursue its own way, though not necessarily to its doom—while Christianity might choose to withdraw for the time being, take a breathing-space, replenish its stores, and abide the time when the world will again come and ask for its participation in mundane matters.

It is this seemingly natural balance between faith in God and man's opportunity to co-operate with Providence which made Brockmöller's diagnosis and prescription such a comfort to Christians, soothing but not debilitating. Meanwhile the infidels, the humanists who would like to be optimistic and active as well, but at the call of reason rather than of faith, have also received much succour. A handful of German philosophers, some of them venerable figures, have raised their voices against the moaning of despair and demonstrated that hope is still compatible with reason. Our reference is however not to Jaspers and Heidegger, although both have felt it incumbent on them to add their pythic oracles to the discussion. Jaspers has just published a five hundred page volume on the atomic bomb, a chain-reaction of verbosity which seems to dismay even his most ardent devotees. Heidegger, in 1953, addressed a symposium on "Arts and the Technical Age," and it was a healthy sign that German scientists and engineers, less docile than the master's disciples, reacted vigorously against Heidegger's manifest failure to understand the essential features of science and technology and his attempt to cover such ignorance by his well-known etymological sleight of hand.

Honours for an urbane discussion of the social, cultural, and anthropological implications of technical progress and for bringing to it a wide knowledge of history and philosophy must go to Friedrich Dessauer,

Theodor Litt, and Friedrich Georg Jünger. Lack of space forbids me to mention the work of others. Were one to be guided by the keen interest aroused and the number of copies sold, Jünger's *Die Perfektion der Technik* would deserve pride of place, as it has now gone into its fourth printing. If we pass it briefly, it is because Jünger's trust is less in what man can do and more in what the logic of history will do for him. Jünger has faith, to be sure not the faith of a Christian, but of a follower of Herder. Black as the picture of our technical age is, a change for the better is bound to come. Men will realize that their technical inventiveness is symptomatic of an increasing impoverishment, of wants multiplying faster than the materials to satisfy them. This imbalance will continue to grow until such a time as men—perhaps prompted by some deep-seated instinct—will revert to their true calling, which is to cultivate not exploit the earth. The farmers and artisans of old who revered nature and recompensed the soil for its gifts will once more become the prototype of a sound, happy community. Jünger holds that the trend in this direction is becoming more and more noticeable. Tired of being herded together in concentration camps—the natural habitat of a mechanized society—people everywhere are beginning to cultivate a more intimate pattern of life. This view has the support of Arnold Gehlen, Germany's foremost sociologist, who notices an increase in independent and individualistic activities, private or in small groups.

The humanists of the Christian or any other observance, while sharing Jünger's predilection for a less dehumanized civilization, cannot leave things to a sort of pre-ordained historical process. They must ask for their share of responsibility in the world to come, not to flatter their ego but to confirm the dignity of man. Such scope for the employment of willpower and reason is provided by Dessauer and Litt. Dessauer, a lifelong student of the relation between culture and technology, has compiled an impressive survey of all manner of contributions that have been made to the theme, since the middle of the last century: *Streit um die Technik* (1956). Its bibliography of more than thirty pages is not just a piece of academic window-dressing, nor has the vast volume of material digested by Dessauer incapacitated him for clear, optimistic thinking. Convinced that training in scientific methods and their technical utilization has its own inestimable merits—mainly those of accustoming a person to objective thinking and observing—and that mankind would be much the poorer for the discouragement of such occupations, Dessauer expects much of a synthesis of scientific with humanistic education. The latter will, in this combination, help man to find and

impose the ultimate goals towards which science and technology must be directed. These over-all purposes do not emerge from experiments and laboratories, but must be envisaged by minds—often the same scientific minds—that can see beyond the sphere of physical evidence and biological assumptions.

Theodor Litt has arrived at much the same conclusion in his short though searching investigation of technical thought and humanistic education: *Technisches Denken und Menschliche Bildung* (1957). To find his conclusions irritatingly vague is to forget a German idiosyncrasy for philosophically rock-bottomed foundations on which to erect educational structures. Litt has limited himself to this first step, for the time being. Mention has been made of his criticism of Wilhelm von Humboldt, Herder, and Schiller. It is to their inability to understand the profoundly human impulses in science and technical practice that he attributes the splitting of German intellectual and national life into twain, into humanists and scientists, workers and thinkers. Litt undertakes to rejoin the two by pointing to their common source in man's intellectual endowment and deducing their equal rights to exist. Scientific and technical propensities are not something "that ought not to be," as the humanists of the classical age were wont to say. On the contrary, such activities arise by virtue of the same natural constitution which also gives birth to religious, artistic, and philosophical creations. Technical work is rendered possible by man's scientific observations, and these in turn are an exercise of his ability—as great a distinction as any—to see his environment objectively, without any personal bias. Man alone of all living beings enjoys this privilege. If it is in him by divine intent, it must also have been intended for wide use. Similarly, there can be no talk of nature's being violated by objective inquisitiveness, since—again by some providential act—nature is so constituted that it will reveal itself to scientific soundings. Nature and Science are attuned to one another; not to take the hint and study nature as an object would mean to fail in a noble task, which is to know the world we are living in. Scientific investigation bears the *nihil obstat* of the highest conceivable authority.

It is the same with technical skill. Making tools and applying them are not something "that ought not to be." They issue from lofty human faculties and respond to lofty impulses—to relieve suffering, help countless men to a more bearable existence, facilitate the exchange of ideas, bring cultural works to many millions who would otherwise be deprived of their enjoyment. But have not these faculties overdrawn their credit and brought us to the verge of bankruptcy? The gleeful eye with which

Litt seems to have anticipated this question and the buoyant alertness with which he hastens to answer it are something impressive to behold in a man of his age. It is as if he had waited all his life for the hour in which humanism would either triumph or have to abdicate. The hour came with the atomic bomb. Nothing less than the threat of total annihilation by man's own hand will decide whether or not man can live up to his promise and prove himself a reasonable, responsible being. He can now show that he is willing and able to master the danger, remove the fuse and turn atomic energy (for Litt still in the class of means to an end) to some beneficial purpose. The humanist cannot possibly wish that Providence or the logic of history will lead mankind out of the present impasse. He wants to do that himself, by dint of his insight and goodwill. The crossroads are needed to show whether we can choose the right path. Without the ambivalent power to do good and evil man could not become what he aspires to be, a self-reliant humanist. He had to invent the bomb, Litt thinks, on the premisses of his God-given intellectual faculties; he will have to dismantle it on the premisses of his love for orderly, happy society. The bomb has put us in the driver's seat, and if we are not now capable and willing to handle the reins intelligently, we had better drop all claim to being something more than savages. One feels reminded of Radhakrishnan's saying: "To be good is to be capable of all evil and yet commit none."

The practical requirements arising from these views are self-evident. Litt pleads for the same humanistic motivation which Dessauer and others hope will give guidance to scientific exploration and technical inventions, and he sketches the same educational changes. What must come first are: intensified familiarity with the humanities, not in opposition to technology and science, but co-operating with and informed of what goes on in the scientific and industrial world; a scientific and technical specialization that remains conscious of its obligation to society. Ill-used technical knowledge, we read in Litt's treatise, is as detrimental to the welfare of men as a humanistic education which refuses to accept its social involvement. Given the time to work out the details to complement these fundamental tenets Litt can be counted on to speak again. It will be interesting to learn of his suggestions for reforming German high-school and university education.

HAWTHORNE'S MYTHOLOGY: A MIRROR FOR PURITANS

Hugo McPherson

In the past two decades Hawthorne's critics have written more about his life and art than was produced in the preceding century, but the deepest recesses of the "haunted chamber" of his imagination have remained disconcertingly dark. Scholars have formulated—better than he himself could have done—his ideas on religion, politics, philosophy, and aesthetics; they have recruited the skills of science to decipher passages in his letters and journals that had been inked out with loving prudery by his widow; they have used the methods of the New Criticism to study his art in terms of bipolar image schemes such as head and heart, light and dark, "marriage" and isolation. But despite all this, they have not been able to reveal the informing principle which gives coherence to the full range of his work. Some of the most puzzling elements of his fiction are still described as "Gothic trappings," a label which, like Swift's *lusus naturae*, betrays something that the doctors do not understand.

The one area in which criticism has been inactive is the study of Hawthorne's plots or *actions*, and the "forces" or personalities that act out his symbolic dramas; and it is in precisely this area that the informing principle of his art is to be found.[1] Like Spenser and Bunyan, two of his favourite artists, he saw the human career not as a rational scheme of ideas or a fixed pattern of symbols but as a living drama. In Hawthorne's imagination, three related situations, which he treats either singly or in combination, recur persistently. They form a complex narrative which gives coherence to the entire range of his work: its stream carries all the rational barks of his politics, theology, aesthetics, and morality, and directs them towards a clearly envisioned destination.

This narrative centre of Hawthorne's art has not been clearly identified before now because critics have neglected two of his simplest and apparently most inconsequential works, *A Wonder-Book* and *Tangle-*

wood Tales—twelve episodes from Greek mythology which he retold for children. The literary merit of these works is not great, although the tenacity with which several of them persist in the imagination lifts them far above the "progressive reader" rituals of John and Betty. Their very simplicity, however, takes us directly to the heart of Hawthorne's imagination; they reveal in outline his intuition of the *narrative* of man's experience, whether it takes place in ancient Greece or in the America of Emerson and Andrew Jackson.

The central situation of this myth, as revealed in six of the twelve tales, is as follows: a young hero undertakes a dangerous quest; it is undertaken at the prompting, or command, of a jealous king; its fulfilment involves the killing of a monster; and the hero's reward (with the exception of Bellerophon, the rider of Pegasus) is kingship. Hawthorne's formulation of this basic situation often alters the original stories radically. Although he used a specific classical source,[2] he made the stories entirely his "own property," a personal myth. The tales, he wrote,

> (not by any strained effort of the narrator's, but in harmony with their inherent germ) *transform* themselves, and reassume the shapes which they might be supposed to possess in the pure childhood of the world . . . and therefore it is that we must raise the intellect and fancy to the level of childhood, in order to re-create the original myths.[3]

We shall not attempt here to trace the process by which Hawthorne transformed the original quest story into a "pure" form in which the hero was always successful, or how in the New England romances the same action came to appear as a sombre myth of "experience." Instead, we shall analyse the central situation and its two related "narratives," and indicate their function as the prime structural principle in his major romances.

The prime feature of Hawthorne's personal myth is a division between the hot, sunlit world of material things and the cool, moonlit world of imagination and thought. The material realm, as Hawthorne sees it, is the area in which men organize and build things; it is the concrete dimension of man's world, and it is associated with money, iron, power, the senses, and the narrow rationalism of law; but it is, finally, a world of appearance. By contrast, the imaginative realm is an insubstantial area of vision or insight, associated with moonlight, mirrors, and fountains. It is only in this dusky area that man can discover what is most *worth* doing. This is the world of reality, and it must, finally, govern the world of things. Thus, with a few minor exceptions, Hawthorne's heroes, whether classical or contemporary, are men of vision—moon-heroes—and their quest is an attempt to discover their own identity

and use it creatively in the objective world. By analogy, moreover, their quest is the struggle of a nation to find *its* true identity and its place in the international community.

At the beginning of the quest, the materialistic forces of appearance —such sun-blinded tyrants as Polydectes and Minos—dominate. Guided only by reason, law, or lust, they are at once jealous of the young men who threaten their power and terrified of the dark mysteries of the creative realm, both sexual and imaginative. Hence they send their young relatives on quests into the moonlit world in the full expectancy that they will be destroyed by a Gorgon or a Minotaur. But the heroes are aided in their tasks by Quicksilver (a personification of the moon-mirror image), Minerva, the goddess of wisdom, or a pale, moon-girl like Ariadne. The monsters which they overcome appear, finally, to be *delusory* monsters—creatures which have an objective existence only for those who have not explored the night side of experience. Thus Perseus sees the Gorgon Medusa only as a reflection in his shield, but she can turn the credulous Polydectes and his court to stone.

Hawthorne's myth, then, though externalized or projected in dramatic personalities, is fundamentally a myth of the self. In its "pure" form, moreover, it is optimistic in tone; there are no "dying heroes" like Orpheus or Adonis here. Each new generation of heroes brings back to the world of appearance a knowledge of reality which enables him to become a "king"—a benefactor of his race. There is one significant variation of this pattern: the young hero Bellerophon, by gazing long and patiently into the fountain (mirror, moon) of Pirene, sees the reflection of Pegasus, and finally makes this magnificent creature of the air his servant and friend. Then, as master of this offspring of the Gorgon Medusa, he combats "earth-born" Chimeras by lifting them into the imaginative realm of air and destroying them. The hero, in short, may become a complete man like Perseus, a city-builder like Cadmus, or an artist like Bellerophon. The myth applies equally to the self, the community, and the artist.

But this central "narrative" is not as simple as it appears, for there are a dozen other forces or personalities, active or passive, imaginative or materialistic, who aid or hinder the quest, and who may even make it miscarry. The stories of the Greek champions who lived "in the pure childhood of the world" are simply an *ideal* form of Hawthorne's personal myth. Their success is what *ought* to happen: they ought to be helped by passive moon-friends in conquering aggressive moon-monsters; they ought to supplant their aggressive, materialistic uncles and restore their benign, passively "sunny" parents to honour. By con-

trast, the hero's quest in the historical world of experience is painful and disillusioning.

Before we turn from the pure myth to the narrative of New England "experience," however, we must consider two related mythological situations. With the first we can be brief. Hawthorne believed above all else that the locus of man's happiness is the heart—the human realm which unites the opposed forces of appearance and reality, matter and mind. To live only for things is to be blinded by sun or gold—to be an iron-hearted rationalist, like Minos or the Puritan rulers. To live only for imagination is equally inhuman; the moon-man, though his vision must direct the objective realm, will perish of cold if he fails to "marry" his vision to the world of things. Man's nature, the heart, is at the centre of Hawthorne's myth, and its presiding value is love. Three of the mythological tales underline this key perception: Hercules' adventure with the Pygmies moralizes awkwardly on the brotherhood of man; "The Miraculous Pitcher," even though Hawthorne fills it with sentimental treacle, lends the authority of Jupiter to the law of love; and "The Golden Touch" is a skilful parable which reveals the uselessness of wealth which is sought for its own sake. Hawthorne would have agreed with Auden that "We must love one another or die." The goal of the quest is the brotherhood of man—democracy—and it will be reached not by reformers or builders but by a growth of self-awareness and vision.

Second, and this theme is far more complex, we have a feminine version of the hero's quest, revealed in the tales of Circe, Pandora, and Proserpina. The protagonist of this narrative is the Dark Lady who has so fascinated and baffled Hawthorne's readers and critics. To begin with, as her fecund charms indicate, she is primarily a creature of the empirical realm, but she is also a creative force. Where the hero creates ideas or works of art, she creates babies, but this creative act is linked with the realm of night. Like the questing hero, she has had her dark initiation in the moonlit world.

For Hawthorne she is no more a figure of guilt than is the artist. The creative act, whether fiction or fornication, is fundamental to human nature; and man must recognize this rather than condemn it. Thus, though Circe appears as a vile enchantress who makes beasts of men, Hawthorne reveals that a man like Ulysses—armed with the imaginative talisman of Quicksilver—can meet her as a friendly master. She will bestialize him only if he lives for the senses and temporal things alone. Hawthorne's telling of this tale is coy, for he does not permit his Ulysses to go on and "enjoy" Circe for "a full year," as Homer did,

but his idea is clear. And in the stories of Pandora and Proserpina his view is unmistakable. In Pandora's case, the Fall resulted from simple curiosity—a trait which Epimetheus (Adam) shared with her almost equally. In opening the box, Pandora did no more than obey the law of her nature. Evil, that is, is a *donnée* which Hawthorne does not attempt to explain. He knows only that it exists and that woman is no more responsible for it than man. In the same way, Proserpina's fall was caused by nothing more unnatural than extreme hunger—for seeds, significantly. In the Proserpina story, Pluto is not a "devil" in the Christian sense. He is an embodiment of the night realm who hopes to warm his isolated heart with a little human love.

The Dark Lady's initiation, then, occurred at the beginning of time, and it is innocent. Nevertheless, this lady can be dangerous in two ways. First, before the young hero can achieve his identity, he must recognize and pass beyond the force of maternal wisdom. (Since Hawthorne understood this event without reference to "incest-barriers," we need not use psychological terminology.) In the hero's childhood, the maternal power is Minerva-like; but this same power, extended into his manhood, becomes monstrous—a Medusa. This double quality of the female powers is suggested by the fact that the Gorgon Medusa is the emblem on Minerva's shield, and paradoxically it is Minerva herself who helps the hero to destroy the Medusa and set free the winged horse Pegasus. Second, if the Dark Lady is denied her lush, creative power, she becomes rebellious. Hence Hester, whom the Puritans hoped to reduce to the mannish dreariness of the goodwives of Boston, defiantly maintained her private view that her act "had a consecration of its own"; to justify it as "natural" she entered boldly into the hero's speculative realm which appeared to her as "a dusky labyrinth of thought."

In the "pure" myth, then, the Dark Lady (Pandora, Proserpina) is blameless. It is only in the Christian tradition that she has become a figure of fear, haunted by the spectre of a "Black Man" who will never let society forget that she knows the realm of night. Her Christian embodiments, Miriam, Zenobia, and Hester, detest the shadow which haunts them, but Calvinist men will never clear them of its opprobrium. The figure of the Dark Lady thus prepares us to enter the world of experience—the historical locale of Hawthorne's New England fiction.

As his name suggests, the archetypal figure of Hawthorne's Puritan fiction is Young Goodman Brown—a Calvinist Everyman. The ambiguity of his experience suggests that his night journey is the timeless quest which all men must make into the depths of their own nature. But in contrast to the heroes of the ideal myth, the outcome of Goodman

Brown's quest is tragic: deprived of the help of Mercury and Minerva, he desperately calls on his Faith for help, but his Faith is committed to a belief in man's evil, too. And so he returns from the quest convinced of the monstrous power of the night side of man's nature. His entire life is blighted by his dark vision, and even "his dying hour was gloom." In its very beginnings, then, the New England quest was in some degree abortive. In the quest to build a new City of God on a new continent, the Puritans' intrepidity and skill in controlling the material forces of their environment were magnificent, but their legalistic, rationalistic theology, as Hawthorne saw it, pre-doomed them to a kind of half-life. Whatever their material triumphs, they viewed the night side of experience as a realm of evil whose demons and witches constantly threatened to destroy them; instead of confronting and conquering these monsters, as the Greek heroes had done, they attempted to repress them by legal means—by dragging "iniquity . . . out into the sunshine!"

The young America's dilemma was not entirely the result of Calvinist theology, however, although that theology was a prime obstacle. As Hawthorne explored his experience he saw that *any* failure to reconcile the forces of the material and imaginative realms led to isolation—a denial of the community and of the service of love. Thus the Rev. Mr. Hooper's black veil not only symbolized the isolating power of the Puritan vision of evil but, because it increased his isolation, became the very *fact* of evil.[4] In the same way, the scientist, a figure allied to the sun-blinded tyrant, was in danger, through the pursuit of a pure materialism, of cutting himself off from his fellow men—of becoming demonic, a figure of pure sun or flame. He was in danger, in fact, of committing the unpardonable sin—a pursuit of knowledge which finally regards its end as superior to the human beings which it should serve. Roger Chillingworth, the "doctor" of *The Scarlet Letter*, is such a figure. He uses his knowledge coldly, to torture and destroy Dimmesdale rather than to heal him. The artist, at the opposite pole from the scientist, encounters a similar danger. If in his pursuit of imaginative perfection he renounces contact with the warm bloodstream of humanity, he may perish of cold. In "The Prophetic Pictures" the artist's icy and detached inspection of the human heart is, like Chillingworth's inhumanity, an unpardonable sin.

For materialist and imaginative hero alike, then, the route of the quest was fraught with dangers, but the besetting danger of the Puritan experiment was its denial of the imaginative realm. In New England Hawthorne saw the iron-hearted descendants of Minos and Polydectes everywhere in power. Even as late a product of their society as Owen

Warland, "The Artist of the Beautiful," was despised by his master, a Puritan "watch-maker"; moreover, he was to see his master's daughter, his chief contact with the temporal world, turn from him to a virile young blacksmith; and he was to see his beautiful butterfly ("psyche"), the product of long *night* labours, crushed in childish hands. How, then, could the man of vision find his place in American society? As Hawthorne worked out this problem, "marriage" became the central symbol of the hero's reunion with the community. The hero *espoused* the material realm and became a directing, creative force in its life—a father. But in Puritan America the obstacles to this symbolic union were almost insuperable.

After the mis-step of *Fanshawe*, which suggested that the hero's best course was simply to *die* and allow the young materialists to take over, Hawthorne's first major analysis of the American situation was *The Scarlet Letter*. As Henry James rightly perceived, Dimmesdale is the hero of this quest narrative, although the figure of the Dark Lady overshadows him. In Boston, Dimmesdale had achieved the highest place that the Puritan community accorded its men of vision—the pulpit; and from this eminence it was his duty to *fight* the powers of darkness. To the end of his career, Dimmesdale was a believing Calvinist, but his nature—even stronger than his belief—attracted him irresistibly to the lush, temporal charms of Hester, with whom he created a Pearl, "the union of their two natures"; and then, because of his faith, he became an easy prey to the unending tortures of guilt. By the same token, his Dark Lady, Hester, whose temporal creativity could scarcely, under the circumstances, be concealed, was persecuted by a community which feared carnal knowledge as much as it feared the mystery of imagination. To complicate this situation, the community welcomed her husband Roger Chillingworth, a deformed old scientist who had married Hester to warm the cold chamber of his heart. But in Boston his identity is a secret which he forces Hester to keep. In this repressive atmosphere he conveniently recalls "his old faith" and becomes not a source of healing but a "fiend" who uses his knowledge of man's nature to torture the Puritan Dimmesdale to the point of death. But Hester privately refuses to accept the community's view of her nature as evil. Robbed of her real place in the community, she speculates boldly that human nature is "naturally good." Finally, she refuses to keep Chillingworth's secret any longer, and in the "natural" setting of the forest—as opposed to the legal forum of the marketplace—she offers Dimmesdale an escape to the wilderness, or to Europe, where she believes they can live by the law of their natures alone. For a moment

Dimmesdale accepts; then a flood of carnal images reveals to him that man's nature, unregulated by law, is as unthinkable as the repressive Puritan scheme. His solution to the dilemma, therefore, is to confess his full nature publicly. Hester's power has given him strength to be a complete man at last, even though in the Puritan community the price of such a revelation is death.

Dimmesdale's confession of his full nature "humanizes" his daughter Pearl. She becomes a complete person, even though the Puritans still regard her as a demon. But Pearl cannot survive in New England. She escapes to Europe, endowed with Chillingworth's wealth—the chief "good" that the Puritans produced. But despite Dimmesdale's tragic death, the New England quest is not a complete failure, for Hester returns to the scene of her defiance and learns submission. The Puritan austerity may be wrong, but man's imperfect nature must be governed. Her final task is to teach the community that the *A*—the full range of man's nature—is not reprehensible. It can mean *A*ble or *A*ngel. She was sure, too, that "at some brighter period . . . a new truth would be revealed, in order to establish the whole relation between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness."

So ended the New England quest. Dimmesdale, like Perseus, had found his identity, but only at the point of death. Hester, the Dark Lady, learned to accept her unhappy lot and hope for a brighter future. But this gifted pair had broken the dark tyranny of the Puritan vision of evil. With the truth of man's nature revealed, the Black Man, Chillingworth, had "no more devil's work to do." And although Pearl, the complete self, the *A* incarnate, could not live in America, Hester could return and prepare the community to accept her. Ultimately, the *A* would mean *A*merica.

Subsequent moon-heroes, perhaps, would be more vigorous than Dimmesdale. But if they were to be more aggressive, their partners would have to be less aggressive than Hester, for two active forces do not "marry." In the next romances, therefore, Hawthorne's myth elaborated itself in an important new character, the pretty and fecund, but passive, sun-maiden, a delightfully domestic creature who, like Cadmus' wife Harmonia, would be her husband's creative link with the opposing realm. And by the same token, the passive moon-hero, the Dimmesdale of the first nineteen chapters of *The Scarlet Letter*, was to be perpetuated as a proper complement to the Dark Lady, although neither of this latter pair was to triumph in the new American community.

Two centuries and seven long generations later, Hawthorne saw a

happy fulfilment of the American quest in *The House of the Seven Gables*. This quest narrative involves a long struggle between two families: the imaginative craftsmen called Maule, the possessors of a beautiful piece of "garden ground" with a clear, bubbling spring; and the Pyncheons, a family of Puritan materialists who regard the Maules as witches and steal their land as the site for a great house. In revenge, the Maules secrete the title to a great tract of "Eastern land," turn the clear well brackish, curse the sensual Pyncheons with something that resembles apoplexy, and return to torment them in dreams. Nevertheless, the Pyncheons triumph and the Maules disappear from view. But in the course of seven generations, a more sympathetic strain of the Pyncheon family gains control of the house. Hepzibah, associated with owls as Minerva is, and her brother Clifford, a Quicksilver type who has been banished to the darkness of a prison by the sun-tyrant Jaffrey, are in uncertain possession of the house. This pair represent the frail and passive imagination of the nineteenth-century Puritans; unfortunately, they are too old and too weak to dominate their materialistic cousin Jaffrey. They give shelter, however, to a young couple, Holgrave and Phoebe. Holgrave is the last of the Maules, a vigorous and imaginative daguerreotypist who "makes pictures out of sunlight" in his dark chamber. Phoebe, far from reproducing the grasping materialism of her family, is a sunny, domestic angel. And this pair, the young moon-hero and the passive young sun-maiden, the last descendants of their lines, finally unite the warring families in a new and productive marriage. Unlike his forbear who had attempted to enmesh Alice Pyncheon in the magic of wizardry, Holgrave captures Phoebe in "Love's web of sorcery." The curse of the Maules carries off the hard-living Jaffrey, and the new inheritors of the Pyncheon-Maule property move to a new house, carrying their benign elders with them. Significantly, the new house will be built of wood. No family can build for its heirs; each generation must construct its *own* "house." But what of the Eastern land which the Anglophile Pyncheons hoped to wrest from the native Maules and exploit? Holgrave discovered its charter easily in the old house, and Clifford Pyncheon had known about it all along. He had thought of it as a vision—an ideal—which was not to be owned by anyone, let alone the domineering Pyncheons. In the end, the Eastern land turns out to be a "thriving colony"; it is the part of New England (or America) which the Puritans' greed failed to engulf.

The plot of *Seven Gables*, then, whatever its relation to fairytale or Gothic romance, is not the "tiresome nuisance" that critics have complained of. It is an almost pastoral version of Hawthorne's central quest

narrative, and its action dramatizes with great subtlety the long quest of the nation's visionary powers to find their place of honour in the community, and to keep the Puritan ethos from dominating the entire "Eastern land." More important perhaps, this perception of the informing principle of the romance reveals that all of Hawthorne's comments on the past, the advantages of frame houses, progress, and so forth, are relevant parts of the complete structure, not tedious "tacked-on" morals.

Similarly, *The Blithedale Romance*, whatever its limitations as a mass entertainment, is a clear and coherent statement of Hawthorne's central myth. In addition, it is his most sophisticated and disillusioned book. Coverdale, the imaginative hero, hoped that the experiment of Blithedale (America) would produce "the one true system," a community in which the full range of mankind's talents would be both fulfilled and accepted. But this idyllic dream is a failure. The sun-blinded materialist of Greek mythology and of the Puritan theocracy now appears as the reformer Hollingsworth, a former blacksmith who can see man's nature only as depraved and evil. Still worse, the Black Man of the colonial period still plagues the women of Blithedale, now in the guise of a charlatan mesmerist, Professor Westervelt. Coverdale recognizes that this detestable spectre is no more than "a moral and physical humbug," but the women's ties to him pre-date the beginning of Blithedale.

Again, Hawthorne's so-called Gothic trappings reveal themselves as organic elements of the action. Zenobia and Priscilla (the Dark Lady figure has now split into active and passive "sisters") were sent to Blithedale by their father, a one-eyed vagrant who reminds us of Odin, the "prime mover";[5] the father's one stipulation was that the sisters should be treated as equals. But the satanic Westervelt has been "wedded" to Zenobia, and attempts to mesmerize Priscilla. Priscilla, we realize, might emerge as the ideal American woman if Westervelt and Hollingsworth would allow her to; indeed, her frail beauty blossoms so well in the community that she promises to be a second Phoebe Pyncheon. Zenobia's legend of "The Silvery Veil," however, suggests that if men are to win this virgin they must have *faith*, even without seeing her face, that she is "a heavenly essence . . . which might have been tamed down to human bliss," rather than an Eve or Medusa. But Hollingsworth thinks of her only as a weak and erring woman. He rejects Zenobia, just as the Puritans had rejected Hester, "saves" Priscilla from her evil and makes her his mouse—a pathetic creature whose promise of bloom quickly fades.

Ruled by Hollingsworth, the community inevitably fails, and when

Coverdale sees him last he is a melancholy figure, supported by his frail partner. The potential "wealth" of Blithedale—the potential talents of Zenobia, Coverdale, and Priscilla—have been tragically wasted. Coverdale confesses that he had loved Priscilla, but she chose the "blind" materialist as her protector. And so, though Coverdale lives in comparative opulence, he feels that he has no real place in American society; his ideal hopes (the outcome of the pure myth) have failed, and he must console himself with the role of dilettante. Yet the picture is not unrelievedly bleak: Coverdale does produce a bitter parable of his experience by telling his story; his novel, like the portentous "Prophetic Pictures," may warn America of its continuing failure to recognize and use creatively the full potential of its human resources.

In *The Marble Faun*, Hawthorne uses his European experience to compare the pattern of the old culture with that of the New World, but the forces or personalities of the myth are still the same, although the tyrannical father or uncle does not appear. In Rome, the tradition of woman's responsibility in the Fall still persists. The lush and brilliant Miriam is haunted by a spectre that suggests a dim past of sexual guilt. But Donatello, an unreflective faun from the "state of nature," believes that he can rid Miriam of her dark persecutor by the simple expedient of killing him. In doing so, he embraces the darkness of mankind's post-lapsarian state, and must, through a long process of suffering, learn to recognize and accept humanity's imperfect nature. The spectre whom he believed he had murdered does not die in the usual way. It is connected with the institution of the Church, and the lovers discover it the following day, on display at a Capucin monastery where it will, in effect, *never* be buried. But if the Roman Church, so to speak, "keeps the devil alive"—keeps reminding man of his fallen nature—it also offers, unlike the Puritan faith, a means of salvation. Donatello and Miriam must suffer sorely for their humanity, but in the end they will receive the blessing of a benign father, symbolized by the statue of Pope Julius.

Hilda and Kenyon, the American observers, however, are not directly involved in this European pattern of sin and expiation. Although the shadow of evil falls upon them, they suffer no more than guilt by association (which, as Joseph McCarthy has taught us, is serious enough). Both of them, it appears, have until this moment lived in the cold realm of art which, as Hawthorne confessed to Sophia, "Is but the thinnest substance of a dream,—till the heart be touched." Their contact with the fallible humanity of Miriam and Donatello, therefore, is their initiation into the community of imperfect men. Yet their guilt is not that of their Euro-

pean friends. They are an immaculate pair, and their fall is symbolic rather than actual. Thus Hilda disappears into the darkness of a convent, just as Proserpina had spent six innocent months in Pluto's dark kingdom, and Kenyon must discover, in an ancient grave, a nude sculpture of Venus in which he recognizes "womanhood . . . without prejudice to its divinity." Then, after undergoing a symbolic death in the timeless ritual of a Roman carnival, he regains his Hilda, appropriately dressed in the black and white chequer of Dominoe. Their initiation has humanized them without involving them in the suffering of the European pattern. Their future is not clear, but Hilda sees "light on the mountaintops." The American experiment, in these terms, is far from a failure. Kenyon, the imaginative man of vision, has found his contact with the community in the person of a pure, dove-like Venus. America has escaped the guilt of Europe, and though the lovers strike us as priggish and sanctimonious, they may resolve the American quest in happiness.

This, in skeletal form, is Hawthorne's imaginative narrative of the self, the artist, and America. It was the only thing he wrote about, really. To justify the ways of God to man was not his purpose; he began, instead, with *man*, and attempted to show how humanity, by recognizing and enfranchising its powers of vision, could approach the ideal of God. In this process, or narrative, the inescapable centre is always the *heart* —the *A* Gules—in which the temporal and the eternal are inextricably combined. Man's triumph will be the knowledge and control of *himself*. And the dramatic action of the forces which compete for dominance in the heart is the basis of Hawthorne's art. In terms of this action, his ideas and images, his theology and psychology, all assume a new meaning and a new relevance.

NOTES

1 Randall Stewart pioneered this study in his Introduction to *The American Notebooks by Nathaniel Hawthorne* (New Haven, 1932). Until now, his work has not been followed up.

2 Hawthorne's source for the mythological tales, hitherto unknown, is Professor Charles Anthon's *A Classical Dictionary* . . . (4th ed.; New York, 1848).

3 *The Complete Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Boston, 1883), IV, 209–10.

4 Cf. W. Stacy Johnson, "Sin and Salvation in Hawthorne," *Hibbert Journal*, L (1951), 40. Mr. Johnson and F. O. Matthiessen are the most reliable analysts of Hawthorne's theology.

5 Roy R. Male, in *Hawthorne's Tragic Vision* (Austin, Texas, 1957), has noted the tendency of Hawthorne's later heroines to "split" into two personalities. Q. D. Leavis, "Hawthorne as Poet," *Sewanee Review*, LIX (Summer 1951), 442, has seen the resemblance of Old Moodie to Odin.

PSYCHOLOGICAL AMBIGUITY IN *LA NOUVELLE HÉLOÏSE*

Hans Wolpe

"The land of the chimera is of this world the only worthy dwelling place; and such is the emptiness of all things human, that outside of the self-existing Being, there is nothing beautiful but that which does not exist."[1] This quotation from *La Nouvelle Héloïse* could symbolize the whole work and serve as its epigraph. For indeed this "book of enchantment," as it has been so aptly called, unfolds in an atmosphere which borrows little, if anything, from objective reality. The distorting effect of Rousseau's imagination has always been fully discussed in any serious analysis of his political writings, but we turn to studies of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* to find that this factor has been hardly touched upon.

Everything combined from the very first to cloud the real question: whence the aesthetic value of the work, its illusion of reality? Rousseau's contemporaries were entranced by it but were deluded into hailing it as the sensational revelation of actual trials of love. "*Julie: Or La Nouvelle Héloïse: Or Letters of Two Lovers from a Little Town at the Foot of the Alps*, collected and published by Jean-Jacques Rousseau": the full title shows why contemporaries believed they were reading authentic letters which had fallen into the hands of, and were being made public by, Rousseau. His readers discussed Julie, Saint-Preux, Wolmar, and Claire as if they were real people. They took sides; they made value judgments. The issue was further obscured by envious, ironic, and defensive reactions from the critics who resented the novel's literary success. They interpreted the work as a diptych: the first panel portraying the triumph of passion, the second that of moral virtue: and then proceeded to attack it as psychologically unsound.

Modern scholars have contributed little to clarify the issue. They have attempted to explain the novel by stating that it is based on

Rousseau's personal experience, on his passionate and unrequited love for Mme d'Houdetot. She prompted, according to Mornet, Gérin, and Seillière, "the hallucination of his whole being," "a desperate love," and "a love quasi-satisfied by that of his beloved for another."[2]

We know that Rousseau met Mme d'Houdetot in the spring of 1756 at a time when he had already begun his work on *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, and had abandoned himself in his solitude to erotic dreams, which, in his own opinion, were a "delirium." From his account of his flowering love, we can see the extent to which his passion is rooted in fiction and is indebted to the imagination—to mimesis: "To finish me off, she spoke to me of Saint Lambert as would an impassioned mistress—we were both drunk with love, she for her lover, I for her. Our sighs, our delightful tears mingled!" In no way are we dealing here with a spontaneous and natural passion, but rather with a feeling which is already literary, and as such, artificial. We have entered directly into the "land of the chimera."

Rousseau did not love women; this can never be too often repeated. It was the tender, voluptuous, and false memories of them which he delighted in evoking. This enchanted atmosphere, which is found in his novel, gave him much more satisfaction than love itself would have done. Eros had always found in Jean-Jacques a sorry standard-bearer. The verdict of an expert Italian courtesan is proof enough: "Lascia le donne e studia la mathematica."

Forgetful of the land of the chimera, most scholars, sensitive and intelligent as they may be, cannot get away from prosaic reality. F. C. Green, with Gérin, and so many others, holds that *La Nouvelle Héloïse* is founded on experience. "Saint Preux is Rousseau himself. Julie sums up all the women he has loved: Mlles. de Graffenried and Galley, Mlle. Serre, Mme. d'Houdetot. Wolmar is simply a more sensitive Saint Lambert. . . ."[3] In Green's opinion, Rousseau identifies himself with Saint Preux, and as Rousseau cannot tolerate a Saint Lambert getting the better of him, he cannot permit Wolmar to prevail over Julie's lover. On her deathbed Julie realizes that she has always been faithful to Saint Preux. With a touch of vindictiveness Green concludes, "It is therefore pleasant to be able to record that Mme. d'Houdetot remained the faithful mistress of Saint Lambert until 1803, when, at the age of eighty-seven, he died in her arms."

What Green fails to see is that though Saint Preux is indeed Rousseau, Julie is too, and so are Wolmar and Claire. But the characters are not puppets, uttering the scarcely disguised tones of the author's voice; they

are Rousseau to the extent that he visualizes them in his imagination. Rousseau is not a Proteus capable of metamorphosis; rather, he reflects several aspects of his personality in his characters. With deeper insight, Mornet writes, "*La Nouvelle Héloïse* is a confession and a dream. It is the expression of an ardent interior life, not the calculated work of a man of letters."[4]

But Mornet should have realized that Rousseau is writing a novel. He makes a plan and modifies it; he conceives his characters and develops them; and if, according to certain critics, Flaubert himself among their number, he does not succeed in making them live, at least he lives in them. He wants to create a work of art, and in his eyes "there is nothing beautiful but that which does not exist." The illusion of reality in *La Nouvelle Héloïse* is born of its aesthetic value, and if it was possible to believe in the authenticity of the letters, it is precisely because they came from the land of the chimera, and not from a little town at the foot of the Alps. We may hold that Rousseau is portraying himself; but we must admit, with Mornet, that the confession-novel did not yet exist. Rousseau is a dreamer who weaves out of his dream a work of art which has the appearance of objective reality, and has thereby saved his characters from that uniformity and lack of depth which would have made them puppets indeed. He achieves this artistic *tour de force* by a subtle portrayal of their psychology.

> Two or three simple but sensitive young people talk among themselves of the interests of their hearts . . . they are children; are they to think as men? they are foreigners; are they to express themselves correctly? Is the importance they give to their wild ideas less amusing than all the wit they could display? . . . they refuse to consider discouraging truths: nowhere encountering what they feel, they withdraw into themselves; they detach themselves from the rest of the universe. . . .

Thus it is that Rousseau himself describes his characters in the second Preface. This withdrawal into himself, this outpouring of solipsism really constitutes a new spectacle: that of characters seemingly simple and naïve, taken from life, who are in reality different reflections of Rousseau's imagination, an imagination at once ardent and subtle, spontaneous and ambiguous.

It is quite remarkable that no one has yet called attention to the psychological ambiguity of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. Specifically, the character of Claire has been strangely neglected. "Claire loves Saint Preux but Claire is superfluous,"[5] writes Charpentier. To Mornet, Claire is a literary souvenir of Richardson, an interpretation of Miss Howe seasoned

with hazy, personal memories. Other critics mention her only as a vague, minor character, or even pass her by in silence.

In the first pages of the novel (Part I, Letter 3), Saint Preux writes to Julie that his heart "will henceforth divide its entire homage between you and virtue, and the altar where Julie was adored will never be profaned by other fires." The last letter of the novel returns to the same theme but in a very different tone: "A man who has been loved by Julie d'Etange and could resolve to marry another, is in my eyes nothing but an unworthy coward. . . ." It is not by chance that these lines were written by Claire. From Saint Preux to Julie, from Julie to Claire, from Claire to Saint Preux, the psychological triangle takes shape. In the fourth letter, Claire is mentioned for the first time: "My friend is absent, my brother is no more, nowhere in the world do I find a protector from the enemy who pursues me." Claire is the only positive element from which Julie can derive strength in the struggle against her developing passions. The father is unapproachable, the mother spineless, and the brother dead. Claire is more than a friend.

Here is her first letter (Part I, Letter 8): "The live and tender friendship which has united us almost from the cradle," she writes to Julie, "has, so to speak, early made the heart wise to all the passions." Together, the two young girls have intellectually scrutinized all the aspects of love; here they have no longer anything to learn. Thus, at the very beginning of their love, Julie writes to Saint Preux, "My too-tender heart is in need of love, but my senses have no need whatever of a lover" (Letter 9). And in Letter 11, "I am a thousand times more touched by your respect than by your transports." When Julie makes a first rendezvous with Saint Preux, she declares with no apparent difficulty that "we will not go together into the bower without the inseparable cousin." "Inseparable cousin" is in italics in the text, but a critic has yet to notice this "inseparability."

A well-known engraving by Deveria depicts the scene of the kiss of Julie and Saint Preux, and the artist renders Rousseau's ambiguity to perfection. Julie swoons under the caress of Saint Preux, but quite as close to her as the young man, Claire supports her, watching, eyes wide open in an expressionless face. Julie's dress is light, Claire's dark, and while Julie abandons her lips to Saint Preux, she yields her hand—to Claire.

Letters 28 and 29 (Part I) relate respectively Julie's "reeling senses" and the "loss of her virginity." But what is of particular interest is that these two letters are addressed to Claire, whom Julie makes partially

responsible for her fate: "Cruel one! You leave me when I have most need of you" (Letter 28). "You have abandoned me and I have perished" (Letter 29). And we read a strange request: "I have lost the right to pretend to your friendship," Julie writes, "but never have I needed it more." How has she lost this right? How can the consummation of her love for Saint Preux, a love of which Claire knew, and whose developments she witnessed, destroy the bond uniting her to Claire? Rousseau has taken care to show that neither of the girls is prudish, so why this fear?

Letter 30 contains Claire's answer. She blames herself for not having remained with her friend. It is she who is guilty, for she had foreseen the danger and had not been able to protect her friend from it. She goes on to console Julie:

> If you have no justification, consider at least your excuse. I know pretty well that which is called love; I could always resist the transports it inspires, but I would have resisted less to a love such as yours; and, though I have not been conquered, I am less chaste than you.

Claire has said she does not at all fear the temptations of love. How, then, could her chastity waver? The only feasible interpretation of this strange sentence is, "If I had burned with your love, I would have resisted less." Claire identifies herself with Julie. The difference in interpretation here presents my first example of ambiguity. The diaphanous line between "ton amour" (your love) and "amour de toi" (love of you) is made yet finer when, in the same letter, Claire declares that Julie does not speak of her greatest fault: she had considered fleeing with Saint Preux. "Look, I would have sought you out to the ends of the earth to kill you," Claire says passionately, if not seriously.

Saint Preux, in his turn, sends a letter to Julie (Part I, Letter 38) evoking a scene of friendly effusiveness between the two cousins:

> Heavens! what a ravishing sight, or rather what ectasy, to see two such touching beauties kiss one another tenderly, the face of the one bending over the breast of the other, their sweet tears intermingling to bathe this charming breast as the dew from heaven moistens a freshly blown lily! I was jealous of such a tender friendship. . . . nothing on earth is capable of exciting such a voluptuous tenderness except your mutual caresses; and the sight of two lovers would have presented a less delightful sensation to my eyes.

The jealousy of Saint Preux is not ridiculous. He is confronted with a friendship so tender and so ambiguous that it takes all the perfect sureness of Rousseau's art to prevent skidding into the eroticism of Crébillon or the smut of Diderot. It remains none the less true that friendship and

love unite Saint Preux and Julie, Julie and Claire, Claire and Saint Preux, into an inseparable trio.

Letter 54, ardent and voluptuous, was felt to merit inclusion in *The Temple of Venus*, an erotic anthology which appeared in London in 1774. The letter is interesting for two reasons. It proves, first, that Rousseau knows how to use a deliberately ambiguous vocabulary. Saint Preux enters his mistress' bedroom:

> O voluptuous sight! The stays have yielded to her pressure . . . delightful imprints, let me kiss you a thousand time! Lord, Lord! what will it be when . . . ah! I imagine already that tender heart beating under a happy hand! Julie! my charming Julie! I see you, I feel you everywhere, I breathe you with the air that you have breathed! You penetrate all my substance. How burning and painful your *séjour* is for me; it is terrible for my impatience. . . .

An old meaning of *séjour* signifies "absence, delay," but Rousseau uses the word because the usual meaning of *séjour* is altogether different, signifying "the place where one stays." The second point is that this burning and intimate letter was not read by Julie alone. She has shown it to Claire, who is later to discuss it with Saint Preux.

We begin to understand Claire's rôle in the novel: she is not a minor character, or the reflection of one of Richardson's characters, or a confidant. In every major crisis, it is always Claire round whom events turn. It is she who indicates to Saint Preux or Julie a new direction to take, or who reveals a change in the situation. As such, her position is weak; she runs the risk of becoming the automatic solution of the problem. But the real *reason d'être* of Claire is her position in the triangle she forms with Saint Preux and Julie. She writes to M. d'Orbe, who is to marry her: "My Julie is dearer to me than you. . . . moreover, I attach myself so much to what is dear to her, that her lover and you are in my heart to about the same degree, although in different ways." To Julie she declares (Part II, Letter 5): "I love perfectly only you." "Perfectly" means with a complete love. What an astonishing *tour de force* that Rousseau has been able to establish such psychological foundations for his work, without ever failing to hoodwink his readers! Yet, could he have been clearer without rending the elusive veil which is precisely what lends interest to his characters? The love of Claire for Julie is so complete that, in the same letter, she declares herself ready to follow her friend no matter where: "I am abandoning a marriage about to be entered into. It is up to M. d'Orbe, if he loves me, to console himself. . . . he is nothing to me next to my Julie." Later, Claire, now a widow, writes to her cousin (Part IV, Letter 2): "Scarcely had I lost my

husband, when you filled the emptiness he had left in my heart. . . . as soon as he was no longer, I belonged to you alone."

There are even better examples of this ambiguity: at the very beginning of their love (Part I, Letter 11) Julie writes to Saint Preux, "Our souls have, so to speak, touched one another in every part, and we have everywhere felt the same adherence." Claire declares to Julie (Part I, Letter 5), "When they united, our souls felt each other too well for anything ever to separate them." Notice that it is the two women who use similar expressions to describe metaphysically the effect of impassioned love and impassioned friendship. "Does the soul have a sex?" Claire asks Julie. "Truthfully, I hardly sense one in mine."

In the first part of the novel Julie and Saint Preux are necessarily in the foreground. How could it be otherwise? It is a question of showing impassioned love awakening, claiming its due, struggling, wounded, beaten. But Claire is never out of sight. She is not a bookish shadow like Lord Bomston, for example. In the second part, which has generally been considered as the triumph of morality, the character of Claire is developed, and imposes itself much more than that of Wolmar, although the latter ought logically to counterbalance Saint Preux; for, after all, if the reader is to understand Julie's feelings for her husband, what could be more aesthetically logical than to show these feelings by means of letters to and from Wolmar? Such is not the case. We come to know Wolmar mainly through letters exchanged between Julie and Claire and, to a lesser degree, between Julie and Saint Preux.

But more than any other character, it is Claire who sets the pace in the second half of the novel. Claire has just lost her husband; Julie presses her to come to live with her, and no longer to hide herself mourning M. d'Orbe. "We shall mourn him together." But she is wrong; Claire does not mourn M. d'Orbe, or, rather, she mourns him superficially.

> Listen, I am mourning my poor husband very sincerely; I would have given half my life to spend the other half with him; but, however, if he were to return, I don't believe that I would take even him back, except for the fact that I had taken him once.

In the same letter (Part IV, Letter 2), Claire once more expresses her sentiments for Julie:

> You see, my poor child, there is no secret fluctuation in you which escapes me. I divine you, I penetrate you, I pierce the most profound depths of your soul; and it is for that I have always adored you. . . . Little ingrate! you console me in everything, and nothing can afflict me when I possess you.

Penetrate, possess, adore—ambiguous words, double meanings which can as well express one or the other aspect of love.

In a new crisis, when Julie imagines that Claire loves Saint Preux, we find that the friendship between the two cousins once again constitutes the crucial factor; for, although both of them loved Saint Preux, Claire loved him because of Julie. After having described herself to Saint Preux as the sole perpetrator of his removal (Part II, Letter 8), she insists on going into detail:

> You will be dear to me as long as Julie loves you, and I would say more if it were possible. I do not repent for having neither favoured nor combated your love. The pure zeal of friendship which has always guided me, justifies me equally in what I have done for and against you. . . .

And, again, she can write to him:

> I made a brother of your lover, you know it. . . . It was not at all my reason but my heart which made this choice. In kissing you I was kissing the dearest half of yourself. The liveliness of my caresses was their own guarantee of purity.

Thus Saint Preux is loved by Claire only in ratio to Julie's love for him.

"Both of us, our hearts filled by the same object, accustomed ourselves so much to placing him between us, that except by annihilating you, we could no longer reach one another" (Part IV, Letter 2). This is true, and so is the reverse. Saint Preux is interested in Claire only because he knows that she loves Julie with a love comparable to his: a transposition of characters analogous to the one Rousseau effected when Sophie d'Houdetot was talking of Saint Lambert. The merit of Rousseau's novel is to have been able to lend to this complicated, cloudy operation an ease and simplicity which have misled his readers. And yet, he makes a game of pushing the ambiguity of the situation to the extreme. Thus, Saint Preux describes the relationship between the two girls in a letter to Julie, explaining the difference between what he feels for her and what he feels for Claire (Part VI, Letter 7):

> I find again in her and me two friends who love one another tenderly and who declare it. But do two lovers love one another? No, *you* and *I* are words proscribed by their tongues: they are no longer two, they are one.

But ironically, Saint Preux and Julie, in their most intimate moments, have always been two, not one: Julie gave herself to him not through an outburst of passion, but through pity. "I saw him in his convulsive fit, ready to swoon at my feet. Perhaps love alone would have spared me;

oh my cousin, it is pity which ruined me." (Part I, Letter 29.) And Saint Preux, leaving the arms of his mistress, wrote (Part I, Letter 55):

> I must confess to you a suspicion which came to me in my own shame and humiliation; it is that you know how to love better than I. . . . I want to enjoy, and you want to love; I am carried away, you are passionate; all my transports are not the equal of your delightful languor. . . .

A true union is established between Claire and Julie, and not between the two lovers; for the latter there has been only a vain struggle to establish such a union. Truly a person gives himself entirely only once, and it is not to love that the two cousins have given themselves entirely, but to the most passionate of friendships. It is for this reason (and not for the "refined bitchery" of Green) that Julie wants to give Claire to Saint Preux; for, at a certain level, Claire and Julie intermingle, they are one.

Rousseau, it has been often said, is, in irrationality, the most rigorous of logicians. He concludes his demonstration in *La Nouvelle Héloïse* with the elegance of a geometrician. He destroys Julie.

This death imposes itself of necessity. After the failure of the marriage plan, we are blocked by an impasse. The three characters are in equilibrium, and this equilibrium cannot be disturbed except to the detriment of probability. It would be improbable for Saint Preux to marry Claire, and just as strange for Julie again to become Saint Preux's mistress. Rousseau hesitated: up until February 1758 he had contemplated using a murder and suicide, but he recoiled at this choice—his characters would have become marionettes. All his subtle efforts to develop them and the ambiguity of their relations and reactions would have been for naught. Julie was to die, and she was to die by accident.

Julie's accidental death gives Rousseau the opportunity for a grand finale. This is not to say that the grand finale is for Julie. Though so much has been made of her death, it constitutes neither the end of the book nor the denouement. The grand finale of the novel is the triumph of ambiguity; and Claire, of course, is its protagonist.

Everyone now seems more worried about Claire than about Julie. It is Claire from whom the truth must be hidden. "Claire," says Julie, "will never be able to withstand this blow except by my hand; she will die of it if it comes from another. . . ."

Claire is at the end of her strength, and the only way she can be persuaded to rest is to share Julie's bed. "As for me, I [Wolmar] was sent away, and, actually, I did need some rest" (Part VI, Letter 11). When Wolmar enters the room the next morning, he sees Claire,

seated in an armchair, exhausted and pale, or rather ghastly white, her eyes heavy and dull; but sweet, tranquil, speaking little, and doing whatever she was told without answering. As for Julie, she seemed to have taken the vitality of her cousin.

The feverishness of Claire has passed into Julie; the night with Julie has made an automaton of Claire, has broken her will. It is she who appears to be dying. There is ambiguity in the situation as well as in the style. An imperceptible adjustment of lighting would make out of this tableau, without changing the details, something very different from the tmesis of love which it represents.

The approaching hysteria has been carefully prepared by Rousseau. At the death of her friend,

Claire [he writes] entered Julie's room every few moments, threw herself on her body, warmed it with her own, striving to reanimate it, pressed it, clung to it with a kind of rage, called it with loud cries by a thousand passionate names. . . .

Again a scene where the ambiguity is preserved only by one fact: we are dealing with a *dead* body.

Claire, suffering from fits of hysteria which terrify her maid, "rolls howling on the floor, biting the legs of the chairs." "The convulsions which shook her had something frightening about them," notes Wolmar. These convulsions are analogous to those which shook Saint Preux at the moment when Julie was about to yield. This parallel is not as arbitrary as one might think. For in spite of the critics, Rousseau is an artist who does produce calculated effects.

Claire is the last to see Julie's features; she covers them with a veil and curses him who would dare to lift it. This is a supreme jealousy, and not a "theatrical gesture" as Green would have it. If Rousseau's characters do not possess the inner coherence of the "simple young people" Rousseau claims he is creating, they do have their own coherence.

Julie definitely has hers. She sends a letter to Saint Preux which he is to read only after her death. She can, she must, speak of the eventualities which might have been, but which are non-existent. "I dare to pride myself on the past, but who could have answered for my future? . . . What would have happened in a whole lifetime spent with you? What dangers I have run without knowing it! . . ." These dangers have been greatly exaggerated. They have been called the proof of Saint Preux's triumph over Wolmar. The "post-mortem" element, which puts them in their proper perspective, has been completely ignored.

In this same letter (Part VI, Letter 12) we find Julie's last entreaty to Saint Preux. Is it to be faithful to her? Yes, but in marrying Claire: "Each of you is going to lose half of life, unite to conserve the other half. . . . Claire and Julie have merged so completely, that it will no longer be possible for your heart to separate them."

Julie identifies herself with Claire in the possession of Saint Preux; we have already seen Claire identifying herself with Saint Preux in the love of Julie. But how will Claire react to the last wish expressed by her whom she has loved so well? Letter 13 in Part VI is the last in the novel. It is also the denouement which has been so eagerly sought after in Julie's death. It is, very necessarily, a letter from Claire to Saint Preux.

> I have felt love for you, I confess it; perhaps I still feel it, perhaps I shall always feel it; I don't know, and I don't want to know. . . . But here is what I have to tell you, and what you must remember well: that a man who has been loved by Julie d'Etange and could resolve to marry another, is in my eyes nothing but an unworthy coward whom it would dishonour me to have as a friend. And, as for me, I tell you that any man, whoever he might be, who will henceforth dare to speak to me of love, will not speak to me of it again in his life.

We can quickly pass over the love Claire claims to have felt for Saint Preux. That has been no more than a thrill—light, agreeable, and of no consequence. But let us note that Saint Preux was loved by Julie d'Etange and not by Julie de Wolmar: a distinction established by Claire, and which annihilates the husband. Why does she take this violent position towards a man who would deserve disgrace if he resolved to marry, after the object of his affections is deceased, and this object has been the wife of another, and after it was she who had broken with him?

Claire is perfectly unjust; or, rather, the logic in her heart forces her finally, though unknowingly, to reveal herself as she is. That she does not wish to marry Saint Preux is understandable in the light of the same arguments Julie has used: Claire sees in Saint Preux an intrusion, a wedge between herself and Julie. But why does she eliminate in advance all men, including those whom she has not yet met?

To ask the question is to answer it. This is a letter pertaining to love, not to friendship. The whole force of illusion of the characters in *La Nouvelle Héloïse* is founded on this subtle psychology which appears so straightforward, on this ambiguity which assumes the semblance of clarity. The element of eroticism between the two cousins is not presented or ever even mentioned. It exists, however, for eroticism is part of total love, of a love such as the one Claire feels for Julie, Julie who prefers Claire

to Saint Preux. It is not a question, here, of committing a crude mistake, and of making Claire a Sappho. The readers did not suspect the ambiguity, the double meaning, of the protagonists, whose actions and reactions are, however, a direct function of this ambiguity. In other words, it is their psychological ambiguity which gives them their dimensions and their life. I have arrived at a conclusion diametrically opposed to that of Green: "The force that has ensured the survival of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*," he says, "is, therefore, extrinsic to the art of the novel, since it derives mainly from the continuously felt presence of the author."[6] On the contrary, I believe that the studies of Rousseau's biographers have only been destructive to *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. Psychologically, Claire d'Orbe is as fascinating as Emma Bovary. Jean-Jacques' "land of the chimera" is as convincing as that of the most learned of novelists. But the personality of Rousseau fascinates far more than Flaubert's. Must we reproach the biographers and critics of the Citizen for having studied the works too much in the shadow of the master?

"To read the *Héloïse* well," d'Alembert used to say, "one must be filled with a deep passion, or with the desire for that passion." There is the mystery of the book. It is a magic mirror where one sees what one wants to see, where the longing to find conjures up love, virtue, passion; or indignation, sarcasm, ridicule; and with all due respect to d'Alembert, this is a work to be read less "well" and with more accuracy.

NOTES

1 All translations of Rousseau's writings are my own.
2 Daniel Mornet, *Rousseau: L'Homme et l'œuvre* (Paris, 1950), 69; René Gérin, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Paris, 1930), 39; Ernest Seillière, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Paris, 1921), 204.
3 F. C. Green, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: A Critical Study of His Life and Writing* (Cambridge, 1955), 190 ff.
4 Mornet, *Rousseau*, 80–1.
5 John Charpentier, *Rousseau, the Child of Nature* (New York, 1931), 190.
6 Green, *Rousseau*, 213.

THE LIMITATIONS OF GEORGE ORWELL

D. J. Dooley

George Orwell is well on the way to being enshrined as the patron saint of left-wing journalism. Some of the most respected English and American critics have taken up his cause. The process was begun by V. S. Pritchett, who in an obituary notice in the *New Statesman and Nation* praised Orwell as "a kind of saint" and as the "wintry conscience" of a whole generation.[1] In the United States, the chief advocate has been Lionel Trilling; in an introduction to an American reprint of *Homage to Catalonia*, he described this book as one of the most important documents of our time and a demonstration of one of the right ways to confront life, and in fact his introduction (reprinted in *The Opposing Self*) might be described as a panegyric based on the text "He was a virtuous man."[2] With these two leading it, the work of beatification has gone on, until today there is hardly an article on the contemporary literary scene in which Orwell's name is not mentioned, and mentioned with veneration.

The devil's advocate has had some support. For example, Anthony West, in a critical article in the *New Yorker*,[3] attributed Orwell's remorseless pessimism to a psychic wound. In some reminiscences in *Twentieth Century*,[4] Rayner Heppenstall, who shared quarters with Orwell in 1935 and 1936, characterized him as the most intellectually naïve person he had known and described an occasion when Orwell, in a mood of sadistic exaltation, had hit him with a shooting stick. Kingsley Amis, discussing (with reference to Ivy Compton-Burnett) the refusal of admirers to give their hero less than ten out of ten for everything, made this passing comment: " . . . I often feel I will never pick up a book by Orwell again until I have read a frank discussion of the dishonesty and hysteria that mar some of his best work."[5] But Amis's rival for pre-eminence among the younger English writers, John Wain, has been strongly influenced by Orwell and writes of him with the highest praise: "After reading a page of Orwell one knows

instinctively, even without knowing anything about his personal story, that here was a man who would be prepared to give his life for what he believed in."[6] Robert Conquest, in a survey of the poetry of the fifties, emphasizes Orwell's continuing literary influence: "One might without stretching matters too far, say that George Orwell with his principle of real, rather than ideological honesty, exerted, even though indirectly, one of the major influences on major poetry."[7] J. D. Scott, in an issue of the *Saturday Review* devoted to contemporary British writing, surveys without great enthusiasm the mixed bag of postwar writers and then suddenly becomes rhapsodical: "Yet there was Orwell. Looming over all the estheticism and 'social consciousness,' over all the Twenties and Thirties stuff which lingered on into the Forties and Fifties, was a great writer who really understood what was happening to Britain. . . ."[8] Donald Barr, in an assessment of Orwell in a later issue of the same periodical, estimates that he would never again be as famous as he was in the late 1940's, "when he seemed almost the only writer who could explain what all that dingy turbulence was leading to," but nevertheless enshrines him among the authors of the Great Books: "from now on one cannot be a really educated man without knowing a little of him."[9] The canonization, it would seem, has already taken place.

But perhaps it is not too late to suggest that the enthusiasm of his devotees should not blind us to Orwell's limitations. For all his integrity and courage, he may have been a victim of his own "doublethink."

In their praise of Orwell's clear-sightedness, Scott and Barr are echoing the eulogy by V. S. Pritchett: "In corrupt and ever worsening years, he always woke up one miserable hour earlier than anyone else. . . ."[10] However, the evidence does not show that Orwell always had a clearer understanding of events than his contemporaries did; his opinions sometimes appear, not unusually acute, but unusually idiosyncratic. The devastating review of Wavell's *Allenby: A Study in Greatness*, which he wrote for *Horizon* in the autumn of 1940, shows how distorted his judgments could be. Allenby and Wavell were members of a class for which he had little use; therefore, he dismissed them as "thick-necked cavalry generals." "Can one imagine Allenby, or anyone like him," he asked, "making much of a showing in the present war?" He answered his own question: "If we are saved it is not likely to be by anyone whom General Wavell would admire." Almost immediately after this, Wavell launched his spectacular attack in Cyrenaica, and Orwell had to swallow his words: "So the laugh is on me—though, God knows, I am glad enough to have been wrong."[11]

The diary he kept between May 1940 and August 1941 shows even more remarkable aberrations. It is interesting to find the analyst of *clichés* caught up in them—referring to the war, for example, as in part a capitalist conspiracy. He predicted that the British government would make a deal with Hitler after the fall of France, he looked forward to a revolution in England after the end of the war, and he naïvely believed that fear of such a revolution was preventing the issue of weapons to the Home Guard: "Orders to the L.D.V. that *all* revolvers are to be handed over to the police, as they are needed for the army. . . . I believe the real reason for the order is to prevent weapons getting into 'the wrong' hands."[12]

On evidence much less damning than this, Anthony West concludes that "there is nothing in the realm of common or uncommon experience that Orwell cannot stand on its head and interpret in a negative and essentially paranoid sense."[13] This is too harsh a judgment, but it contains an element of truth. Orwell was predisposed by his childhood experiences (a "psychic wound," West says), and by the restrictions of his intellectual outlook, to see certain things clearly and to ignore or distort others. His gloomy prophecy of an enslaved world was not something forced upon him by the events of the thirties and forties; it was not a prediction based upon greater foresight and greater courage in facing facts than most people have; it was, on the other hand, the product of a mind which had always tended to look at things in a certain way. Almost all the terrors which Orwell saw or imagined in the postwar world were incipient in his childhood, as his account of Crossgates school in "Such, Such Were the Joys" makes clear; West says that what Orwell did in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was to send everybody in England to an enormous Crossgates to be as miserable as himself. The twist which his imagination took is shown by an episode which occurred when he was about twelve years old; one day he bought some candy with a shilling which he was not supposed to have:

> As I came out of the shop I saw on the opposite pavement a small sharp-faced man who seemed to be staring very hard at my school cap. Instantly a horrible fear went through me. There could be no doubt as to who the man was. He was a spy placed there by Sim!

That the headmaster would have an army of informers at his disposal, he tells us, seemed to him then the most natural thing in the world. His recollections show that his mental and emotional world at that time was composed of much the same elements as appear in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*:

spies, class antagonism, feelings of inferiority, the need for suspicion and wariness, the expectation of the sudden, brutal, and irresponsible use of power by the possessors of it.

"It wouldn't have been so gloomy if I hadn't been so ill," Orwell said of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.[14] But Cyril Connolly, who was at school with Orwell, remembers him saying, "in his flat, ageless voice," that there was only one remedy for all diseases—death.[15] In his writings before World War II, and even before the Spanish Civil War, there are predictions and symbols of disaster. At the beginning of *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935), Dorothy Hare's alarm clock "exploded like a horrid little bomb of bell metal. . . ." In *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936), the thought of bombs occurs to Gordon Comstock several times, and with it a prediction of doom:

> He watched the ribbon of torn paper whirling, fluttering on the Q.T. Sauce advertisement. Our civilization is dying. It *must* be dying. But it isn't going to die in its bed. Presently the aeroplanes are coming. Zoom—whizz—crash! —The whole western world going up in a roar of high explosives.

At the end of *Homage to Catalonia* (1938), his account of his experiences in the Spanish Civil War, Orwell describes his return to the sleek landscape of southern England, the peaceful wilderness of outer London, and the city itself—"all sleeping the deep, deep sleep of England, from which I sometimes fear that we shall never wake till we are jerked out of it by the roar of bombs." And so his next book, *Coming Up for Air* (1939), was intended to awaken England to the possibility of war. The novel is not just a warning against Hitler, however; it is the postwar period which the narrator, George Bowling, really fears:

> But it isn't the war that matters, it's the after-war. The world we're going down into, the kind of hate-world, slogan-world. The coloured shirts, the barbed wire, the rubber truncheons. The secret cells where the electric light burns night and day. . . . And the processions and the posters with enormous faces. . . . It's all going to happen.

Nineteen Eighty-Four, therefore, must be read as the predictions of a man who was predisposed to look at things in a pessimistic way. In "Why I Write," Orwell himself said that the subject-matter of an author will be determined by the age in which he lives, but "before he ever begins to write he will have acquired an emotional attitude from which he will never completely escape."

There is more evidence to indicate Orwell's predispositions and the

abnormal circumscription of his outlook. Wyndham Lewis provides us with some in his book *Rude Assignment*. He tells how astonished he was to read, in Orwell's "London Letter" in the *Partisan Review* for Summer 1946, this comment about himself:

> The intellectual struggle between Stalinists and anti-Stalinists goes on and on, with frequent sensational defections from one side or the other. Wyndham Lewis, I am credibly informed, has become a Communist or at least a strong sympathiser, and is writing a book in praise of Stalin to balance his previous books in favour of Hitler.[16]

This fairy story, Lewis says, was not the product of deliberate malice; it was the result of Orwell's preoccupation with politics. Orwell was playing a kind of labelling game, putting people into categories—"stalinists," "anti-stalinists," "cryptos," "fascists," "blimps," and the like. The life of the rank-and-file intellectual, Lewis maintains, revolves about half a dozen childish epithets and the emotions aroused by their utterance. Orwell was not exactly a rank-and-file intellectual, but "I fear he has not entirely ceased to be a schoolboy."

> I do not say that he means any great harm. . . . What I do say is that he suffers from an innate inability to imagine anyone acting from motives other than those belonging to revolutionary politics. He believes that everyone is engaged in playing a game to which he is passionately devoted.[17]

Games require limitations; a player restricts himself to a certain number of objects or counters upon which he can impose a certain order. The game of revolutionary politics requires Orwell to make substitutions in the passage from St. Paul which he employs as an epigraph for *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not money, I am become as a sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. . . . And now abideth faith, hope, money, these three; but the greatest of these is money." In this book he plays an unusually limited form of the game: he makes everything in a man's life, every single circumstance, depend upon money. As Elizabeth Sewell points out in her book *The Field of Nonsense*,[18] such deliberate limitations of perspective have their dangers. Lewis Carroll, forming numerous friendships with small girls whom he dropped as soon as they began to grow up, was trying to exclude adult emotional experience from his life; he eliminated those things he could not control. "I don't want to be anybody's prisoner," says Alice, and Carroll, following this precept, imprisons himself inside his own game. Something

like this is also true of Orwell. Atkins says of him that in his book reviews as soon as he turned away from literature with a political or sociological message he was lost;[19] Stephen Spender said that Orwell wrote as completely out of social consciousness as Eliot does out of a feeling for the past, and that the totalitarian atmosphere in which his mind operated was one of metaphysical claustrophobia.[20] Wyndham Lewis has given us one illustration of how the rules of his political game prevented Orwell from arriving at the truth; A. L. Rowse can provide us with another.

In a letter to the *Times Literary Supplement* in September 1956,[21] Rowse discussed his experience with *The English People*, a book of Orwell's which the British Council had asked him to read in manuscript. He was astonished at the inaccuracy or irresponsibility of certain statements. The first one he mentions is this: "For perhaps a hundred and fifty years, organized religion, or conscious religious belief of any kind, have had very little hold on the mass of the English people." Although he describes himself as no more a believer than Orwell was, Rowse considers the statement very unjust, and has no trouble proving it so; he cites, for example, the influence of Methodism on the trade-union movement and the Labour party. He pointed out this mistake and many more in the typescript of Orwell's book. But when the book ultimately appeared he saw that Orwell had not corrected a single one of the misstatements. The most charitable view we can take of this is that, following the rules of his game, Orwell could not admit the possibility that religion had had a real grip on the English people during the period after the Industrial Revolution.

In general, Orwell's references to religion are what we should expect of a left-wing propagandist. Sometimes, as in his essay on Dickens, it is belittled as one of "the smelly little orthodoxies contending for our souls." Elsewhere it is regarded as a major obstacle to human happiness: "As long as supernatural beliefs persist, men can be exploited by cunning priests and oligarchs, and the technical progress which is the prerequisite of a just society cannot be achieved."[22] Among the four main obstacles to European unity he included the Catholic Church, which, he said, is always against any freedom of thought and speech, against human equality, and against any form of society which tends to promote earthly happiness. In "Reflections on Gandhi" he chose to be a sinner rather than a saint. The average human being wants the best possible life on earth; the Christian wishes to provide an alternative and better life.

Therefore, Orwell argues, the true hedonist is the Christian, who is always struggling to escape from life and find refuge in the Kingdom of Heaven. Atkins' comment seems a fair judgment of his attitude to religion: "In his view religious belief had become a lie, simply an attempt to persuade the poor to accept their lot."[23]

Yet after he had adopted an essentially Marxist approach to religion, Orwell sometimes manifested a desire to escape from it. In an article written in 1935, he discussed the change of ideals which was reflected in some recent novels: "Instead of being the ideal Christian sanctity, it is now the ideal—equally unattained by most people—of a life fully lived. . . . It is perhaps a spiritual come-down."[24] In *A Clergyman's Daughter*, he makes Dorothy Hare lose her faith but cling to religious observances:

> She perceived that in all that happens in church, however absurd and cowardly its supposed purpose may be, there is something—it is hard to define, but something of decency, of spiritual comeliness—that is not easily found in the world outside. It seemed to her that even though you no longer believe, it is better to go to church than not; better to follow in the ancient ways than to drift in rootless freedom.

Like her, Orwell maintained some sort of religious affiliation, and his funeral, by his own wish, took place from a church. For all his belief in a materialistic Utopia, he considered that the only real good in the world was that small proportion of the inheritance from their church-going ancestors which his generation had preserved, and in "Looking Back on the Spanish War" he stated that "The major problem of our time is the decay of the belief in personal immortality."

This problem is of central importance in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In Oceania, faith in religion has been superseded by faith in the state. God's eye is replaced by the eye of Big Brother. Big Brother is a jealous god, who insists that every thought, word, and deed be devoted to him. All citizens are taught the desirability of controlling the passions; chastity is as deeply ingrained in the Party women as Party loyalty; and the members of the Inner Party are reputed to lead monastic lives. Churches such as St. Martin's-in-the-Fields are now used for propaganda displays —waxwork tableaux illustrating enemy atrocities and the like. Two Minute Hates take the place of religious services; during one of them, a hysterical woman calls Big Brother "My Saviour!" and then buries her face in her hands: "It was apparent that she was uttering a prayer." The word *orthodoxy* is mentioned again and again; opposed to it is

the heresy associated with Goldstein's name. Clearly, an analogy with religion is intended by Orwell in his description of the rigorism which enslaves Winston Smith.

The individual who sins habitually in thought or deed is in danger of becoming a lost soul, and he is assigned a spiritual director who attempts to show him the error of his ways. Winston falls from grace in Parts I and II, and Part III deals with his regeneration. O'Brien is an inquisitor, but the function of an inquisitor is to save a sinner and make him perfect. Though he employs torture, O'Brien has "the air of a doctor, a teacher, even a priest, anxious to explain and persuade rather than to punish." Julia's rebelliousness and deceit were burned out of her very quickly; hers was "a perfect conversion, a textbook case." Winston is more difficult; on the last page he reproaches himself bitterly for his contumacy: "O stubborn, self-willed exile from the loving heart!" But by this time he has attained to the stage of perfect submission of his will to the larger will. His soul has been made white as snow; he loves Big Brother.

The critical stage in his reintegration is the one which O'Brien calls understanding, and it is here that Orwell's quandary becomes apparent. O'Brien asks Winston why the Party clings to power, and Winston begins to reply, "You are ruling over us for our own good. . . ." Immediately he is stabbed with pain. "That was stupid, Winston, stupid!" says O'Brien. For the party seeks power for its own sake: "We are the priests of power. God is power." O'Brien and his colleagues achieve a vicarious immortality through their membership in the Inner Party, since the mind of the Party is collective and immortal: "That is the world we are preparing, Winston. A world of victory after victory, triumph after triumph: an endless pressing, pressing, pressing upon the nerve of power." To Winston's horrified objections, he gives crushing answers. Winston says that it cannot happen, but when O'Brien asks what there is to prevent it, he cannot give a satisfactory reply:

> " . . . There is something in the universe—I don't know, some spirit, some principle—that you will never overcome."
> "Do you believe in God, Winston?"
> "No."
> "Then what is it, this principle that will defeat us?"
> "I don't know. The spirit of Man."

But Winston represents the spirit of man in the story, and he is defeated. The only principle which could defeat Big Brother, the only principle which could prevent the universal tyranny which Orwell foresees, is a

divine Providence, and Winston-Orwell does not believe that such a Being exists.

The game is a losing one. It was shown as such in *Animal Farm* too: proletarian revolutions inevitably lose their idealism and give power to a new group of pigs. Where lies the hope of changing the god of power into the God of love? Orwell cannot say. As long as he stays within the limits of the game of revolutionary politics, he can see no basis for hope.

Yet he will not go outside these limits, even though he shows how unsatisfactory they are. In *Animal Farm*, as Geoffrey Ashe has pointed out,[25] he quietly dismisses the whole Marxist myth of history. The tyranny of the pigs is not due to environmental conditions; the lesson of the book is that when revolutions become perverted they do so for moral reasons. In most of his writing, Orwell is concerned with problems of good and evil, and he finds the Marxist approach to them inadequate: he cannot accept the view that the good is that which advances the cause of revolutionary socialism. In fact, he holds the reactionary view that the revolutionary ethic is inferior to the old-fashioned Christian values which it is supplanting. "One cannot have any worthwhile picture of the future," he wrote in 1944, "unless one realizes how much we have lost by the decay of Christianity."[26] Yet he still plays the revolutionary game. He still sees contemporary events in terms of "the struggle of the gradually awakening common people against the lords of property and their hired liars and bumsuckers," he still says that materialism must come first in point of time, and he still says that behind criticism of such materialism "lies the simple intention of those with money or privileges to cling to them."[27] He remains an idealistic and revolutionary socialist to the end—even after he has proved to his own satisfaction that revolutionary activity leads nowhere, and that, unless there is a principle of justice in the universe, nothing can stop the spread of tyranny. Like Winston Smith, he seems to be capable of holding contradictories as simultaneously true—the view that the worthwhile values of life are preserved by religion and the view that religion is only a form of exploitation. His thinking, therefore, can hardly be said to reflect extraordinary clarity. His books are interesting, not as warnings of a prophet who realized the truth before anyone else, but as portraits of the mind of a man who, almost as much as Lewis Carroll, imprisoned himself inside the game he played.

NOTES

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3 Anthony West, "George Orwell," in *Principles and Persuasions* (New York, 1957).
3 Rayner Heppenstall, "The Shooting Stick" and "Orwell Intermittent," *Twentieth Century*, CLVII (1955), 367–73, 470–83.
5 Kingsley Amis, "One World and Its Way," *Twentieth Century*, CLVIII (1955), 168.
6 Quoted in Ian Williams, "Orwell's Bad Good Books," *Twentieth Century*, CLVII (1955), 359.
7 Robert Conquest, *New Lines: An Anthology* (London, 1956), Introduction.
8 J. D. Scott, "The British Novel: Lively as a Cricket," *Saturday Review*, XXXVIII (May 7, 1955), 23.
9 Donald Barr, "The Answer to George Orwell," *Saturday Review*, XL (March 30, 1957), 21.
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12 "From the Notebooks of George Orwell," *World Review*, n.s., XVI (1950), 27.
13 West, *Principles*, 175.
14 Tom Hopkins, *George Orwell* (London, 1953), 33.
15 Atkins, *George Orwell*, 41.
16 Wyndham Lewis, *Rude Assignment* (London, 1950), 78.
17 *Ibid.*, 78–9.
18 Elizabeth Sewell, *The Field of Nonsense* (London, 1952), chap. XIII.
19 Atkins, *George Orwell*, 307.
20 Stephen Spender, *The Creative Element* (London, 1953), 128, 133.
21 *TLS* (Sept. 14, 1956), 539.
22 "So Runs the World," *Observer*, July 22, 1945, quoted in Atkins, *George Orwell*, 27.
23 Atkins, *George Orwell*, 17.
24 "Some Recent Novels," *New English Weekly*, Aug. 1, 1945, quoted in Atkins, *George Orwell*, 114.
25 Geoffrey Ashe, "A Note on George Orwell," *Commonweal*, LIV (1951), 192.
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27 "Looking Back on the Spanish War," in *England, Your England* (London, 1953), 173-5.

REVIEW ARTICLE

Biography: Craft or Art?

What is a biographer? Is he merely a superior sort of journalist, or must he also be an artist? Is writing a life a narrow branch of history or a form of creative literature? Or may it be something in between, a strange amalgam of science and art? Unfortunately there are no simple answers.

The difference between a craftsman and an artist is obvious. The one knows exactly what his product will be. He works with specific materials and uses traditional techniques. His skill comes as a result of expert teaching and long practice. The other works intuitively, evolving each move that he makes, and not certain until the end just what his work will be. Genius is more important than practice.

Most people in the past have assumed that biography is largely a craft. To be sure, until recently few cared what it was. Compared to the number of books and articles devoted to every kind of problem faced by the poet, the dramatist, and the novelist, the attention paid to life-writing has been astonishingly slight. Literary critics shied away from what seemed to them the province of the historian, and the historians were more interested in broader problems. Little thought was given to the requirements of a true biographer, that is, in addition to industry and skill in composition. For the most part it was assumed that what was involved was merely finding all the available evidence and fitting it into an agreeable narrative. Boswell and Lockhart, according to this point of view, produced masterpieces because they had better subjects and more colourful material, not because they were outstanding creative artists.

Then came Strachey, André Maurois, and the "new" biographers of the 1920's, and the emphasis changed. Biography *is* an art, they insisted, a delicate, intuitive process. A biographer *is* just as much a creator as a novelist or dramatist. Yet, even so, there was no sign of agreement. Virginia Woolf, the close friend of Strachey, regretfully concluded that a biographer is a "craftsman, not an artist; and his work is not a work of art but something betwixt and between." At the same time, Frank Harris in one of his characteristically flamboyant overstatements insisted that biography is the supreme art of all, giving as his reason the fact that it can do what no other art can even attempt, portray the whole spirit of a man.

Happily, in critical circles today the issue is being honestly faced. If there is still little agreement; if the positions taken by various commentators are widely divergent, there is finally an awareness that the technique of

writing a life is more involved than had formerly been assumed. A recent check of essays and books published during the last thirty years showed over fifteen which had either the exact title "The Art of Biography" or were concerned specifically with that topic. Two books published in 1957, John A. Garraty's *The Nature of Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf [Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited], 1957, pp. xiv, 290, xiv, $5.50) and Leon Edel's *Literary Biography*, the Alexander Lectures, 1955–56 (University of Toronto Press, 1957, pp. xiv, 113, $2.00), show clearly the continuing differences of opinion and the increase of interest in the major problems.

Both John A. Garraty and Leon Edel are practising biographers; both are keenly aware of the complexity of the decisions which they faced. Yet in many ways their whole concepts are opposed. Garraty, a professor of history, in his *The Nature of Biography* is chiefly concerned with the slow development of the *genre* and with some practical techniques of assembling material. Edel, a professor of literature, stresses art and style, and is more interested in over-all creative effects. Garraty provides a broad survey, and attempts to be all-inclusive. Edel limits his discussion to literary biography and concentrates on only a few topics. Taken together, they provide an admirable opportunity to examine the state of biographical criticism in our time.

From the start Garraty seems not to have been quite certain of just what his book was to be. In his Foreword he explains that his original intention was to write a sort of manual for biographers which would describe the different types of biography, the uses of psychology, the methods of collecting material, and other research problems. Then he was induced to add a preliminary history of biographical writing from ancient times to the present, with the result that this survey came to occupy over half the book. Consequently the completed volume has something of a split personality, being half historical survey and half practical advice to writers. To evaluate the merits and deficiencies of the book, one must consider the two halves separately.

After a preliminary chapter on "The Nature of Biography" Garraty provides in 120 pages a short history of the development of biography from what we know of burial accounts in ancient Egypt and Assyria to the work of Catherine Drinker Bowen and the *New Yorker* profiles. Admittedly much of the account is derivative (it could hardly be otherwise), leaning heavily on such earlier authorities as Georg Misch, D. R. Stuart, W. H. Dunn, Donald Stauffer, and Sir Harold Nicolson. But the story is smoothly told, in an agreeable journalistic style. For anyone who wishes a quick view of the outstanding peaks in the great biographical ranges, Garraty's summary will be useful. At the back of the book he provides, in an "Essay on Sources," a fairly complete listing (except for Continental works) of what has been written on the subject, though it must be pointed out that these bibliographical gatherings are very difficult to use, since they are tied into the text rather than being either chronologically or topically arranged. With labour, much important information can be quarried from this section, but a student is forced to work hard.

In the second half of his book, Garraty provides four chapters with the

titles "Choosing a Subject," "The Materials of Biography," "The Problem of Personality," and "The Writing of Biography." Here, one would say, must be the meat of the volume. But, alas, a research worker is doomed to disappointment, for although there are illuminating bits, amusing anecdotes, and some useful advice, it is hard to find any organizing principle. Moreover, as a manual it is sketchy at best. Little is included about such technical problems as the use of postmarks for dating, the detection of forgery, the handling of manuscript material. There is no significant discussion of the various ways to retell anecdotes or other problems of composition—and little significant analysis of the validity of various kinds of fictional techniques. Not much help is given in the selection and use of background material, and there is no thorough discussion of the distinctions between the different kinds of biography. Garraty fails to take a definite stand on many crucial problems, such as the use of Freudian psychology, and he is apparently not much interested in the larger questions of art and literary style. His is a grab-bag of miscellaneous biographical information, neither a significant critical study nor an all-inclusive practical handbook.

In contrast, Leon Edel has been careful to limit his topic severely and from the start to make clear exactly what he is doing and why. Originally delivered while he was Alexander Lecturer at the University of Toronto in 1956, his *Literary Biography* remains essentially five lectures on closely related topics.

Edel's chief interests are suggested by the terse subject headings for his five lectures: "Subject," "Quest," "Criticism," "Psychoanalysis," "Time"—the problems of finding and evaluating evidence, the interrelation of an author's works with his own life, the usefulness of the techniques of modern psychiatry, and the puzzling matter of the compression of time in fashioning the story of a man's life. His illustrations are in large part taken from his own work on Henry James and Willa Cather, though there are discussions also of problems connected with Boswell and Thomas Gray. Throughout he is leisurely and discursive. Having no commitment to cover any great body of material, since he is writing neither a history nor a handbook, he can concentrate on what he thinks interesting, and ignore the rest. The result is a delightful and perceptive book, easily the most significant on the subject in our day.

At the beginning Edel writes:

> The biographer may be as imaginative as he pleases—the more imaginative the better—in the way in which he brings together his materials, *but he must not imagine the materials.* He must read himself into the past; but he must also read that past into the present. He must judge the facts, but he must not sit in judgment. He must respect the dead—but he must tell the truth.

It would be difficult to find a better summary of a biographer's problem. He must be an artist and yet at the same time work with restricted materials. He has limitless opportunities for imaginative writing, and yet he cannot invent. Obviously Edel does not doubt the need for something more than mere skill. The fact that, like a classical composer, a biographer works within very clearly defined limits, need not fetter wholly his creative genius. The remainder of Edel's book provides persuasive proof of this conviction.

Even in the laborious collection of evidence more is required than mere assiduity. Consider the difficult matter of suppression of personal details—Henry James, for example, who thought he had every track covered, every crucial paper burned. Here the detective brilliance of a Sherlock Holmes is not enough, for needed also are literary judgment and a gift for synthesis which transcends mere craftsmanship. To dig deep into the personality of another writer requires critical understanding of his works. In our day the dangers of assuming too close a connection—the so-called biographical fallacy and its converse—have been overstressed. It is foolish to assume, as some have tried to do, that there is no reliable connection. Actually, Edel insists, a biographer must always be involved in double critical evaluation. He must examine fully "the substance, the aesthetic qualities, the very fibre, of a work of art in the attempt to recover the mind and the pulse-beat of its creator," and at the same time he must be able to "impose logic and coherence upon the heterogeneous mass of facts he has assembled, recognizing that in the life he is pursuing they seemed quite arbitrary and, on occasion, illogical." Although continually aware of the dangers of any false step, he must be willing to take risks when necessary.

It would require too much space to summarize Edel's subtle and interesting arguments about the use of a man's writings by his biographer, or to document the various points in which he differs from Garraty, who is really not much interested in the same problems. In no place do they differ more widely than in their attitude towards the crucial question of character analysis, the one being chiefly stimulated by modern experimental psychology, and the other by psychoanalysis. In one compact chapter Garraty describes various new techniques used in studies of living persons, which, he suggests, may provide additional evidence for a biographer. There is, for example, the matter of handwriting analysis, long dismissed by conservative historians as quackery, almost akin to palmistry, but more recently used with success by clinical psychologists. Of all forms of "expressive movement" writing is the only one which may survive after death, and thus bear witness as a fixed historical record to emotional variations.

There is also the possibility of mechanical analysis of style and content in a man's writings. Personality, the psychologists maintain, must be reflected in the way in which a man uses words in various kinds of writing. Thus an "action quotient" can be secured by "dividing the number of active (verbal) ideas in a given passage by the number of qualitative (adjectival) ones." If there is an increase of qualitative words, one theorist argues, this indicates increased emotional instability. A careful statistical examination of a man's writings at different periods in his life should thus provide valuable evidence of his inner life.

Still another technique is that used by Dollard and Mowrer, employing what they call a "Discomfort-Relief Quotient." Using the formula $DRQ = D \div (D + R)$, one can analyse a passage of prose by counting the words reflecting discomfort or tension and those reflecting relief or reward. In this manner, the psychologists suggest, a person's reactions to other people can be ascertained merely by applying the DRQ formula to his surviving letters. Where the quotient is high there is evidence of friction and dislike; where

low, the reverse would be true. Or the formula may even be used to show changes at various points in his career.

Garraty cites a technique called "value-analysis" in which autobiographical and personal data can be analysed objectively by means of content analysis, using International Business Machine cards representing frequencies of ideas or words. When the great masses of cards are fed into the machines, a biographer will be presented with simple objective answers to his questions.

To be sure, Garraty makes no claim that these new techniques can solve any major problems for a practising biographer. He merely describes the methods and throws out suggestions concerning their possible use. Because of this tentative approach his chapter proves tantalizingly unrewarding. Again and again a reader cries out for more instances of practical application. The few examples given are inconclusive, proving no more than might have been guessed without all the elaborate mathematical procedure. What is badly needed is a thorough testing of these new techniques, using careful controls and covering various types of evidence. Until more is adduced, a practising biographer is left in a quandary. At first glance it all sounds exciting and stimulating. But just how can the new formulae be adapted to the practical needs of writing a life? What can they do that the old methods cannot?

For example, of what importance is it to find that there is a high "Discomfort-Anxiety Quotient" in letters written by A to B, if it is already known that A dislikes B, or if the external evidence is clear on this matter? If the quotient is high in cases where there is no evidence of dislike or tension, what exactly does this mean? Can the percentage be accepted as convincing evidence of duplicity? Or may it mean that temporarily the writer is under the influence of some external stimulant which influences his choice of words? Has he been reading some other excitable writer, and for the time being may be imitating his style? Or is there another simple stylistic explanation? Without additional external evidence a biographer is still left with difficult decisions. If he has the proper external evidence, there is not much need for all this elaborate internal analysis.

Let me make clear that these reservations are not intended to minimize the possibility of some valuable new sources of information about personality, once the psychologists have further perfected their techniques. The point is only that so far they have produced nothing which will revolutionize a biographer's methods of character building.

On the crucial problem of the use of Freud, Garraty has little significant to say. It is easy to point out how much of Freud's own analysis of Leonardo da Vinci is rendered erroneous by his mistranslation of a single word, *nibbio*. It is not difficult to list the errors, as Garraty does, of Freud's early disciples, who attempted to psychoanalyse famous writers of the past using the most meagre of evidence. Everyone today must realize the dangers of such facile, sensational journalism. Success is difficult enough when a patient is in the same room as his analyst, receptive and willing to confess week after week. How much harder with an unresponsive being dead for centuries!

Freud himself, it must be remembered, recognized the difficulties involved in causal relationships. Through great labour it may be possible to trace back,

step by step, to an original cause. But one cannot in like manner go the other way and say categorically that the same cause in another person will produce a like series of results. In each instance the steps might move in different directions. To argue from some discovered cause, without knowing all the intervening steps which followed, is almost a futile occupation.

Yet does this mean, as some would have it, that we must eschew the new techniques altogether? Because of the enormous chances for error, are we to take no risks at all? Must a biographer put blinders on his eyes and refuse even to consider new methods? To this Edel provides the only proper reply:

> The answer to the misguided use of psychoanalysis is not to close our ears but to ask ourselves: how are we to handle this difficult material while remaining true to our own disciplines—and avoid making complete fools of ourselves?

He sees clearly that a biographer must have complete mastery of the part of psychology which will be useful to him, and at the same time practical knowledge of how to avoid the technical terminology and jargon of the profession. "What we must try to do is to translate the terms in a meaningful way and into language proper to ourselves."

To illustrate just what he means, Edel discusses in detail certain evidence from the life and work of Willa Cather. Beginning with a critical analysis of her *The Professor's House* made by the late E. K. Brown in an Alexander lecture in which he pointed out the central symbol of the novel—the house—Edel then explains how a psychoanalyst would handle the same material "in a broad diagnostic sense." Finally he shows how a biographer, using all the known facts at his disposal, can show what the house symbol meant to Willa Cather herself and how it makes clear much that was obscure in her later life. There is scarcely any need to rehearse here all the facets of this explication and the brilliant intuitive flashes by which the episode is illuminated. It is enough to say that most readers who come with an open mind should be convinced of the basic soundness of the interpretation. But for some doubters the problem may still remain of how necessary was the second, or Freudian, step. Might the perceptive biographer-critic have reached the same conclusions without suspecting that the attic room to which the Professor clings with such pertinacity is a womb symbol, and that the sewing woman and the two dressmaker's dummies are representative of Freud's ideas about infantile sexuality, with its "incestuous fantasies and Oedipal situation"? Is it necessary to know that in the interpolated "Tom Outland's Story" the cliff-dwellers' caves are feminine sexual symbols, which for the hero are "inviolate and untouched, like a seemingly virginal mother," and that his disinclination to share them with a male companion represents basic sibling jealousy or, in the Oedipal phase, his hatred of a "father who possesses the mother in the sexual way the boy aspires to have her"?

Such a bald summary of terms, of course, does violence to Edel's elaborately built up case. A reader who is willing to follow the explication step by step will not find it shocking or forced. Edel is never arbitrary, never irksome, in the way he presents his argument. He is quite willing to see

all the objections and difficulties. Indeed, he himself asks the question: "Does this interpretation, fascinating and incredible though some of it is, tell the layman anything about the novel, as novel?" And if we go further and try to see the novel as a symbolic representation of Miss Cather's own insecurity, her early uprooting, her mother's aloofness, and her search for substitute houses, are we indulging in foolish fantasies? In other words, does the use of Freudian terminology tell us anything new about Willa Cather and her novel? Or does it lead us into false byways and oversimplified solutions? Edel believes that it does bring new dimensions to our understanding.

Consider for a moment this bit of depth analysis:

> All Willa Cather's later works can be read in the light of this deep feeling of insecurity: her choice of the Rock as the symbol of endurance, her rigidity in the face of her nation's growth and change, her gradual regression in her writings to childhood situations—these spring from the same overpowering isolation, the same death-wish yet struggle to live, acted out in the suffocating attic by the professor.

There is ample factual evidence, as Edel makes clear, to document each separate point, but without some awareness of universal patterns of behaviour any such perceptive over-all evaluation would have been impossible. Here, then, is one instance in which the basic terms of psychoanalysis do provide a useful unifying pattern. Edel's final claim does appear to be justified: for any proper understanding of Willa Cather "the biographer has had to unite the qualities of critic and psychoanalyst. By penetrating more deeply into the life it has been possible to penetrate more deeply into the work."

It may be argued that what has been cited is a very special case. Not often is there such an excellent opportunity to combine the three disciplines of historian, analyst, and critic. Rarely does one have enough revealing evidence. Thus what apparently works for Willa Cather may not be suitable for other subjects. How many other authors have so clearly projected their own lives into their writings? For how many have sufficient concrete details survived to reinforce conjecture? The answer is that naturally Edel has chosen a good example to prove his point. With other writers and other situations it would be more difficult. But the point he is making is merely that the new techniques warrant serious consideration, that they should not be shrugged off as superficial charlatanry. Because they have been misused by faulty practitioners, they must not therefore be totally ignored. So far, at least, he is thoroughly convincing.

Most of us would now agree that when rightly understood and rightly used the knowledge of Freudian patterns and Jungian archetypes does provide added insight for a biographer. Obviously he must not clog his narrative with all the technical terms of the psychiatrists. Edel would be the first to agree that in writing a life of Willa Cather there is no need to use such terms as "feminine sexual symbols," "Oedipal phases," "mother figures," or "return to the womb," which he was forced to cite in making his sample analyses. But a biographer must himself be aware of just how his subject would be described in technical language. With this in the back of his mind he must

be able to make interpretations which will be convincing to an average reader. Of course, he must be chary of imposing a pattern where there is insufficient evidence. He must not force his material into a mould, just because he happens to know that such moulds do exist. But where there is enough evidence he will be shirking his duty if he does not avail himself of this new added dimension provided by psychoanalysis.

Dangers of distortion are not a modern discovery. Biographers have always been forced to pick and choose from great masses of evidence, and in such choice they are subjected to inner pressures from their own political or religious inclinations. Every selection, whether it be of a letter to quote or of an anecdote to omit, is partly motivated by a biographer's own background. Everyone recognizes that a Catholic and a Protestant will inevitably choose different evidence when writing lives of Mary Tudor. The problem of Freudian symbolism merely adds one more opportunity for individual choice. Perhaps the distortion of truth through false symbols is no greater than through partisan politics. In the end the truth of a biography still depends on the integrity and perception of its author.

In his last lecture Edel discusses another technique which adds to the complexity of modern biography. This is our relative emancipation from strict chronology. More and more a writer feels himself free to start where he pleases, to dip here and there in his subject's career, to use flash-back scenes and other dramatic techniques—in short, to fashion his portrait with little regard for straight historical narration. No longer need he plod along, year by year, or even period by period. Indeed, we now grant him almost all the devices of the novelists. The only real difference now is that a biographer cannot make up his details. He cannot falsify known facts. But once a biographer has collected his material, and once a writer of fiction has imagined his, their problems are similar—how to fashion a work of art from the great mass of detail. Each requires skill as a writer and genius in understanding character.

All of which brings us back to where we started. Do the new books by Garraty and Edel bring us closer to a solution of the old question of whether a biographer can be a true artist or merely a superior sort of craftsman? Each reader may perhaps provide a different answer, but the safest is to say that he must be both. One thing is certain—the two books give convincing proof of the complexity of the problem. In the mid twentieth century no one can assume that putting together a life is easy, for today we demand more of the finished product than ever before. The assembling of facts and throwing them together in proper order is now recognized as being only a small part of the process. We now insist on dramatic organization and a distinguished style. We ask for critical understanding and psychological penetration.

We are more aware than were our forbears of the subtle distortion of evidence through personal prejudice, and we expect a biographer to arrive at truth through expert understanding of complicated patterns of error. Nothing is cut and dried any more. Even the new techniques described by Garraty for the mechanical analysis of character are not easy to use. Before a "Discomfort-Relief Quotient" can be estimated, someone must come to a decision as to which words indicate some form of discomfort or tension and which relief

or reward. Who makes this decision? How certain can we be that a word used a hundred years ago represented tension to the user, whether it was used seriously, ironically, or merely in imitation of some other author? Fashions in words come and go, sometimes so quickly as to leave almost no record. In each instance human judgment on the part of the modern scholar enters the picture. Consequently, what may on the surface appear to be the most ordinary of processes, preparing cards which can later be fed into an I.B.M. machine, depends at the start on fallible human decisions as to the choice of words.

Even more, when one moves into the realm of psychoanalysis the chances for individual error are increased thousandfold. Where an entire character analysis may depend on the interpretation of a few words or phrases, how can we ever hope for objective certainty? Suppose someone in a letter writes of "using the rod," of "manacles" and "fetters," is this the proof of some latent masochism or sadism in his character? Or may the terms have been used merely in the traditional, metaphoric sense? How can we ever know? Yet a biographer must weigh the evidence and decide. For every sentence he abstracts from a longer letter, for every word that he takes out of complete context, he must make a personal decision. He may himself be unaware of what is going on. He may be under the illusion that he is being objective. But actually from millions of small choices he is fashioning his own portrait of another man. In order to make all these decisions properly the different kinds of skills he must have are almost staggering.

Perhaps the very awareness of this frightening complexity is itself an encouraging sign. Although the goals are more difficult, the challenge therefore is greater. Is it too much to hope that we are on the verge of a genuine revival of interest in biography, and that the books of Garraty and Edel are signs of a new stirring of curiosity about its basic problems? With increased critical awareness there could also come major creative advances.

JAMES L. CLIFFORD

REVIEW

Twentieth-Century French Literature

About twenty-five years ago, when the now rarely mentioned name of Anatole France was, in university circles at least, one to conjure with, much discussion arose as to whether so much emphasis on giants of nineteenth-century French literature was not responsible for neglect of modern supermen. Discussion grew to conviction. Anatole France and his compeers were gradually bowed out of academic and other galas to make room for contemporary stars. So many of the latter were admitted that it became embarrassing to distinguish head-table guests from those who were not. Guides, charts, and keys to the relative importance of the newcomers were few, incomplete, often biased. Today, when it is convenient to consider contemporary French literature as belonging to the last fifty years, books are appearing which attempt to give a general, inclusive, and objective picture of this varied period. One recent example is Helmut Hatzfeld's *Trends and Styles in Twentieth Century French Literature* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press [Montreal: Alvernia Publishing Company], 1957, pp. x, 262, $4.75).

As the title indicates, the author's survey is made with emphasis on matter (trends) and manner (styles) in an effort to find common denominators for both. Professor Hatzfeld is careful to point out that his presentation which "steers a middle course between a literary history and a literary essay" is intended as "a projection of the trends into a space extending from 1900 to 1955." The enterprise is carried out by assessing recurrent subjects and styles in salient works by nearly two hundred writers, all this within the limits of 234 pages.

An introductory chapter, "The General Situation," outlines the book's principal postulates. Professor Hatzfeld's appraisal of trends is summed up in a statement to which he subscribes: "All important 20th century authors, including the serious dramatists, are convinced that the task of literature is not to copy life but to offer free and poetic interpretations of it." Twentieth-century styles, on the other hand, are mainly of three interrelated kinds: the *monologue intérieur*, the stream-of-consciousness technique, and the simultaneous narration of different events. The ensuing eight chapters take their titles from as many predominant trends or clusters of trends, treated in turn, discussions of style being worked in concurrently.

Chapter I, "Individual and Group in Tension," examines the widespread

preoccupation with all types of struggle between individualism and collectivism as offered in works ranging from Jules Romains' seventeen-volume novel *Les Hommes de bonne volonté* (here summarized in seven and a half pages) to such short examples as Vercor's *Le Silence de la mer* and Merle's *Week-end à Zuydecoote*. The second chapter treats a trilogy of related themes—sex, earth, and clan—stressing the work of Colette, Barrès, Giono, Ramuz, the brothers Tharaud, and Camus. Chapter III, linking the subjects of "Introspection, New Aspects of Love and Acte Gratuit" is, not surprisingly, by far the longest, a third of it being devoted to the work of Proust, another third to that of Mauriac, Julien Green, and Lenormand, and the rest to that of some dozen authors, including Gide and Cocteau. The fourth chapter concentrates on various forms of evasion—exoticism, fancy, and dream—as typified in works by Céline, Alain Fournier, Julien Gracq, Brasillach, Maurois, Radiguet, Sagan, Bosco, and Ghéon. Works by Sartre, Camus, Simone de Beauvoir, Anouilh—and Jacques Prévert—provide the background for chapter V, "Existentialist 'Engagement,' " which, because of its closely connected subject-matter and consequently simple structure, is the best section of the book. The sixth chapter tackles the difficult theme of spirituality as revealed by works of Péguy, Emile Baumann, Claudel, Bernanos, Gabriel Marcel, Simone Weil, and others, which, it would seem, were chosen, to borrow a phrase of the author's, "according to the principles of quality, importance and spiritual originality," the last, apparently, being attributable to Roman Catholic Christians alone. Chapter VII, the shortest, concerned with abstract art and pure poetry, discusses the work of such poets as Eluard, Queneau, Cocteau, St.-John Perse (whose true name is incorrectly given) and deals succinctly with those associated with the "querelle de la poésie pure," notably Valéry and the Abbé Bremond. Chapter VIII, on "Collective Stylistic Achievements," traces out individual threads in the tapestry of modern style and provides illustrations of tricks in weaving. A one-page epilogue brings the survey to a close with the reminder that despite the unhealthy atmosphere of much modern French literature and its "quasi-artifacts which contain so much moral poison" one can, more often than not, find underneath the brutality and obscenity a sincere attempt to analyse the tragic plight of modern man and, behind the desperate denial of God, discover an equally desperate longing after Him.

In Professor Hatzfeld's words "the book is meant to appeal to the educated reader who has a certain liking for French culture, and also to advance undergraduate and graduate students specializing in French." For such it may indeed, if properly used, serve as a guide, though should its indications be merely absorbed and not followed up, the sometimes overcondensed information might well produce erroneous impressions.

An experienced reader or teacher of twentieth-century French literature who keeps a copy of the book on his shelves to lend to an inquiring friend or student will feel obliged to accompany his loan with a warning. Certain of the book's mistakes will have made him wonder whether some of the works examined were not entrusted to careless or insensitive readers. Who that has read *Voyage au bout de la nuit* could twice misspell its hero's suggestive surname? What reader of Bosco can accept "uncanny happenings on a farm"

as an adequate summary of the two highly contrasted atmospheres in *Malicroix*? "Magnificat" is not the second but the keystone third, "La Muse qui est la grâce" not third but fourth, of Claudel's five great odes.

There are more serious errors. Stating that Cocteau "believes in the beauty of the idiot world and claims that opium dreams yield a magic language" the author quotes, by way of illustration, eight lines of verse but fails to include the comment made on these by Cocteau (then taking the opium-cure): "Je note textuellement les absurdités transparentes du demi-sommeil matinal."

Speaking of Valéry's images the author writes: "The calm sea covered with some moving sails is 'Ce toit tranquille où marchent des colombes,' or even more veiled: 'Ce toit tranquille où picoraient des focs,' " and he adds: "These poetic pictures are difficult for the reader since the sails stand for the ships on the sea, as doves on a roof, so that it may be said of the sails that bird-like they pick up grain." It is particularly inappropriate that these figures should be chosen as representative of the difficulty of Valéry's imagery. First, they are scarcely difficult; second, the dove image was used by Hugo in 1853, and the roof image was used by children a hundred years later (Walzer, *La poésie de V.*, 1953, p. 330) to the delight of the poet who had early maintained that both figures were natural, simple, and analogous to popular imagery (F. Lefèvre, *Entretiens avec P. V.*, 1926, p. 63).

Again, Malraux's description of a face as "un visage formé par l'union de ses visages successifs" cannot be said to correspond to "the type of music initiated by Claude Debussy in which there is no theme, no line, no sequence of motives, but only fragmentary suggestions" since, as musicians know, the art of Debussy, on careful analysis, is found to possess the classic qualities of balance and restraint and of the skilful treatment of definite melodic themes. The author having thus denied to Debussy's music any "sequence of motives," goes on elsewhere to say: "Marcel Proust finds the sadness motive of Debussy's *Pelléas* in the 'cri des marchands de Paris.' " But Debussy's score contains no specific sadness motive, and what Proust really says in the passage referred to is: "C'est avec la tristesse et le vague de Maeterlinck musicalement transposés par Debussy que le marchand d'escargots, dans un de ces douloureux finales par où l'auteur de *Pelléas* s'apparente à Rameau, . . . ajoutait. . . ."

However, still more distressing than this book's mistakes are some of its generalizations. One example, probably the worst, must suffice. Chapter III, after a reference to beach life in French literature, concludes with this sentence: "It seems that a civilization permeated by eroticism, as is the French, has no possibility of integrating the spirit of callisthenics and gymnastics with a serious love of nature as is the case with the nordic nations." Quite apart from its decidedly unpleasant, not to say comical, overtones, this statement reveals the author as entirely unaware of those maior, if unsensational, features of all French beaches—scout-camps, athletic clubs, hostel groups, community games, and *colonies de vacances*. In any case, such a pronouncement is the antithesis of everything for which scholarship should stand.

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